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Nijino Says She's Quitting as a Magical Girl

Part 1

As the culture festival gets closer, clubs and societies started getting more lively. This of course included the cosplay society. In their case, as they believed in rules and manner, there were few chances for them to cosplay at school. And because of that they were even more passionate about the festival. On top of that, the cosclub's president recently passed on the torch. The former vice president was getting really enthusiastic to carry out her first big event.

“I'd like to renew Yurika-chan's outfit... it's been used for quite a while now”

“President, even if you say that—”

“Hey, you're the president now”

”R-Right. Anyways, senpai. In Nijino-san's case, her feelings for magical girls are extremely strong. So we can't just haphazardly change her outfit”

”You're right... I'd like to learn from those feelings of hers, but they're a problem at times like these”

The cosplay society's program for the culture festival will be an exhibition of photographs and actual cosplay. In regards to the exhibition, it also served as a report of their activities so it wouldn't just include pictures of cosplay, but of their preparations as well. Moreover, the cosplaying isn't just for the sake of cosplaying, but to walk around the school grounds in an outfit, participating in events and hopefully getting more members. Because of the few chances the cosclub had to appeal within school grounds, they put extra energy into the culture festival.

Because of that, wearing the same cosplay as on the exhibition would lower the impact. If they were seen wearing the same outfits, people would assume that they weren't very active. Because of that, new outfits were required, but in this scenario, Yurika was the biggest problem. Her feelings for magical girls was strong and she rarely wore other outfits. Whenever there was something, she would almost always dress up as a magical girl. Calling her devoted sounded nice, but she could also be interpreted as a one-trick pony.

“That's right, senpai. How about we give her outfit an upgrade then? Even if Nijino-san uses that outfit, if we change that, then there's no problems are there?”

”I see, that's something we could do! As expected from the new president I chose, you're brilliant!”

“... It doesn't feel like you're praising me for some reason...”

”That's not true! I am praising you! Now let's get to work on a design! Gather pictures of Yurika”

”I already have them here.”

“It's because of this part of you that I pushed for you to become the new president”

”It only turned out this way because you never did anything, senpai”

“Things are going to get busy!”

”... She's not even listening...”

The former and new presidents worked together on a new design on Yurika's outfit. The teamwork they cultivated last year was still present and

their work was progressing smoothly. Seeing those two, the rest of the girls in the cosclub began narrowing down the direction of their own cosplay.

“What if we focus around magical girls and their enemies?”

“That might be good. In the future Nijino-san will be the center with her passion for cosplay, right?”

”Alright, then I'll be an evil leader”

”Ah, unfair! You're always taking the good parts!”

“Hehehe, the early bird gets the worm!”

The motif for this year's culture festival's cosplay was starting to settle on magical girls. Leaving their real leader aside, this was a long-term strategy to let Yurika, who you could call their ideological leader, devote herself to cosplay. The cosclub members had accepted Yurika.

However, immediately after this, an emergency that would wipe away the excitement from the cosclub occurred.

The report was brought in by one of the members that joined in spring this year. She was an energetic girl that would even get confused with boys, but her expression at this time was a lot less lively than usual. She burst into the cosclub's clubroom with an expression as if she had seen the depths of hell, and spoke in a voice filled with profound despair.

“Nijino says she's quitting as a magical girl!”

That alone was enough to send all of the cosclub into panic.

Part 2

The girl known as Nijino Yurika had taken a long time to become a complete magical girl. By obtaining love and courage, caring for bonds and

friends, and doing good and correcting evil, she had become a true magical girl. By maturing to the point where she could suitably name herself as a magical girl, her surroundings underwent a rapid change. The residents of room 106 would now believe anything Yurika said while being serious, even if that was something completely wild. Magical girl, Rainbow Yurika, was someone worthy of belief.

“Really!? Then let's go right now! Taiyaki! Taiyaki~!”

“No”

“Satomi-san, why are you being so mean!?”

However, in terms of her normal life, Yurika's position hadn't improved at all. Her slack-off personality was still the same. As of late she had gotten confident and was improving, but from time to time her bad habit would come out. And like before, she was still careless. As a result, Koutarou and the others had little trust for her, outside of emergencies.

“You still haven't finished your career report, have you?”

“Ugh”

“We'll get taiyaki after you've finished writing that”

“But this is a reward for getting good grades on the last test, so can't we save that for later!?”

“No can do. You need to value your own future more. Don't just look at all the fun stuff right before you”

Yurika and Koutarou's studying was finally showing off progress as Yurika didn't get a single failing score on the tests the other day. Having scored almost nothing but failing marks in the past, this was remarkable progress for her. That's why Koutarou had decided to take Yurika out to buy some

taiyaki as a reward. However, with her deadline near, Yurika still hadn't filled out her career report, so Koutarou wanted her to do that first. He didn't believe in Yurika's 'I'll do it later'. Because of that, Yurika had a sullen look on her face.

“Sakuraba-senpai, say something to Satomi-san”

So Yurika relied on Harumi, who was sitting next to her. The weather was good today, so the knitting society was holding their activities outside. The place that had been chosen was the bench that got the most sunshine in the school. Koutarou and the others were lined up on the bench, knitting. Having been asked by Yurika, Harumi stopped her knitting and smiled at Koutarou.

“Satomi-kun, you're trying to make Yurika-san's future turn out the way you want it”

“That's right. This is tyranny”

Yurika latched on to Harumi's words and puffed up her cheeks in dissatisfaction.

“You'll definitely end up living a worthless life if I leave you be”

“That's why I'm envious of Yurika-san”

However, Harumi's words differed from what Yurika had wanted half ways through. Yurika wanted her to criticize Koutarou with him, but Harumi's conclusion landed elsewhere.

“You don't have to be envious!! He bullies you with taiyaki as bait you know!?”

Yurika tried her best to appeal to Harumi to get her to change opinion. Without Harumi's support, her taiyaki was fading away.

“Fufu, Yurika-san, Satomi-kun is interested in taking responsibility for your future. That's why he's so harsh on you”

Harumi showed a gentle smile. The truth was that Harumi wasn't on any side. That's why she easily exposed Koutarou's real intentions. This surprised both Yurika and Koutarou.

“Eh...”

“S-Sakuraba-senpai!?”

There was no doubt that Yurika would lead a poor life if left alone. Not wanting that, Koutarou was constantly butting in on her future. And since he was butting in, some degree of resolve was required. As a result, one could say that Koutarou was resolved to take responsibility for Yurika's life. Rather than let letting Yurika's life fall to pieces, he would rather keep her close to keep an eye on her.

“I had to join a band of knights to get Satomi-kun to think that way of me. But Yurika-san doesn't have to. You should take some time to think about that”

“Satomi-san is...”

Seeing Harumi smiling, Yurika glanced at Koutarou from the corner of her eye. What she saw was a Koutarou flinching at Harumi's word. When she saw his expression, her own gradually changed.

Could it be that Satomi-san is really treasuring me right now...?

Her dissatisfaction and surprise softened, and was being replaced with something more pleading. Her cheeks that had been somewhat red turned even redder. She had realized that Koutarou's words weren't because he was trying to be mean.

“U-Uhm, Satomi-san, I... t-that's right, I have to write my career report!”

Yurika awkwardly pulled out a sheet of paper from her bag. This paper was her career report, where she wrote what she hoped to do after graduating high school.

“Name! I have to write my name first! A-And then...”

With blood rushing to her head, Yurika was blanking out, holding her pen the wrong way, forgetting to write her name and so on.

“After graduating I want to, m-marry— I mean, go to a university. I want to go to Kitsushouharukaze University!”

Yurika was desperately struggling to find answers to easy questions. She already had a clear plan for her life in her head, but she couldn't write that down directly. First she'd need to go to Kitsushouharukaze University. Yurika tried her hardest to remember how to write while she filled in the answers.

“Satomi-kun, you have a lot of responsibility to take”

Seeing Yurika like that, Harumi had a cheerful look as she spoke to Koutarou.

Her eyes seemed to be asking him 'What will you do now?'.

“... Sakuraba-senpai, you really understand Yurika, don't you?”

At times like these, nobody could stand up to Harumi. Koutarou raised a white flag and smiled wryly as he dropped his shoulders. Him treasuring Yurika was an unmistakable fact.

“I'm a girl too you know? Besides, my hopes for the future are the same as Yurika's so I know”

Next year, Harumi would graduate and attend Kitsushouharukaze University a year earlier than Koutarou and the others. However the future Harumi was talking about wasn't in regards to this. This was about something much later on.

“I... might not be able to choose the kind of future you wish for, Sakuraba-senpai”

Koutarou realized that many girls had feelings for him, and he too treasured them. Koutarou couldn't pretend not to notice any more. But that was why he couldn't show any ingratitude. He had to make a correct choice that adhered to reason. That choice might hurt Harumi or the others.

“You're too naïve, Satomi-kun”

However, Harumi didn't flinch in the slightest. She extended her slender finger and poked Koutarou's nose, and with eyes full of kindness and determination, she stared into Koutarou's eyes.

“I— no, we, we will probably do the same regardless of what future you choose, Satomi-kun. Thinking that your choice alone can make us move the way you wish is far too conceited”

Harumi had decided that she would stay by Koutarou's side regardless of what he chose to do. And the other girls surely thought the same way. Moreover, the girls' relationships weren't just centered around Koutarou. Firm bonds existed between the girls themselves. That was something that Koutarou's decision alone couldn't change. If Harumi were to say it, their future was already determined.

“... I feel like my responsibilities are getting heavier by the minute”

”Aha, that might be true. But... you won't be able to throw them away”

”Geez, give me a break please, Sakuraba-senpai”

“Fufu, then let's leave it at this for today”

Koutarou had an embarrassed wry smile, while Harumi had a smile full of kindness and love. If someone were to glance at them and wonder who was correct, they wouldn't even need to take a second look. Koutarou was starting to feel the same way. However, accepting that right now was hard. That's why Harumi let Koutarou go. Him not being able to accept things now was yet another choice for the future. That's why Harumi acted the same even here.

During her conversation with Koutarou, a word came up that made Harumi remember a certain problem. It was an urgent problem that needed to be resolved immediately. So as she was already changing the topic, she decided to ask Koutarou about it.

“That's right, Satomi-kun, speaking of the future, there is something we have to decide on”

”Something we have to decide on?”

”I'm talking about the next president of the knitting society”

Currently, Harumi was the president of the knitting society, but she was already in her third year and would graduate soon. That's why she had to decide on the next president before graduation. Hearing that, Yurika who was filling in her paper looked up.

“Satomi-san will be the next president, right?”

As some time passed, Yurika had returned to her normal self. Apart from Harumi, only Koutarou and Yurika were part of the knitting society. In that

case, Yurika believed that Koutarou would become the next president. She was confident that she was too unreliable.

“I think so at least”

“Hmm...”

Yurika and Harumi agreed that Koutarou should be the next president. However, Koutarou himself didn't seem to be into it as he folded his arms and started thinking.

“You don't want to do it?”

That was how Harumi interpreted Koutarou's reaction. It wasn't that strange for him to feel that way, but since they had held their activities together for over a year and a half Harumi felt a little sad as well. But that wasn't the reason for Koutarou's reaction and he quickly shook his head.

“That's not what I meant... Sakuraba-senpai, being honest, do you think anyone would join the knitting society with me as the president?”

“Eh? I would gladly join...”

Harumi slightly tilted her head with a confused look on her face. In her mind, there was no reason why anyone wouldn't join with Koutarou as the president.

“That's because you know me personally, right?”

“The new students don't know Satomi-san, right?”

“That's why I'm sure they'll think this is some suspicious society and will avoid joining”

Koutarou's worries were about his gender and appearance. Compared to the gentleness that the name of knitting society carried, Koutarou was tall

and well built, quite different from one would imagine from a member of the society. That's why Koutarou believed that new students wouldn’t join with him as the president.

“... I'm reluctant to admit that as a girl”

Harumi loved Koutarou, so she didn't want to admit that new students might be afraid of Koutarou. But then again, the chances of that were high. Koutarou's intentions aside, his appearance would invite misunderstanding.

“Satomi-san's always got a scary face, and he's always mean and quick to hit people, so new students would definitely be scared”

But that didn't seem to be the case with Yurika, as she pointed out the faults with Koutarou whilst nodding. Since there were so few occasions where Yurika had a leg up on Koutarou, she wanted to stay on top while she could.

Thud.

“That's because it's you”

“See, he'll get mean! And hit you!”

“I wouldn't do that to any new students”

“I~ do~n't be~lieve you~”

Thud.

“I-I'm shorry, I said too much”

“Very good”

However, Yurika only maintained the upper hand for a few seconds. Koutarou quickly wrestled back the control and returned to the original topic.

“Anyways, I think the next president shouldn't be me”

“But if it's not Satomi-kun, the next president would be—”

“So it would... Yurika, we're counting on you”

“Huh?”

Convinced that Koutarou would become the new president, Yurika was unable to follow the flow of the discussion and her eyes shot wide open as she was asked. She had no idea what was being asked of her.

“Eh, eh... Eeeeeehhhh!? M-Meeee!?”

“Why don't you realize that...”

Apart from Harumi, only Koutarou and Yurika were part of the knitting society. The next president would of course be one of them, and if Koutarou can't, then that only leaves Yurika.

“I-I-I can't! I can't do it! I definitely can't be the next president!!”

Having finally understood the situation, Yurika desperately shook her head. Her twintails swung about with her head. She had never even imagined herself as the president, and she had no confidence that she'd be fit for the job. That was when Koutarou put his hand on Yurika's shoulder. His big arm firmly supported her body.

“Don't worry, it's only on paper”

”Eh? On paper?”

“I'll do all of the actual work. In exchange, you'll have to be the president during club introductions and speeches. That way the impressions of the society should work out better”

However, Koutarou wasn't planning on pushing all of the responsibility on Yurika. Emergencies aside, he knew that Yurika wasn't suited as a leader during peaceful times. That's why he'd take care of most things, while Yurika would act as the president during events. Koutarou's plan was to soften the impression of the society by having them work together.

“I-If that's all then...”

“That said, at least work on your knitting a little. You will be the president after all”

“I'll do my best”

Including the recruitment of new students, Yurika felt like she'd be able to do it if it was just at events. Moreover, Koutarou was saying he'd back her up, so she felt some relief as well. Besides, if they didn't secure any new members next year, the society would end with them. Yurika knew that they'd have to use any means possible.

“But still, becoming the president and participating in school events...”

Yurika heartily muttered.

“What?”

Koutarou glanced at Yurika and saw her smiling.

“I was just thinking that in that case I won't have to dress up as a magical girl”

Until now, Yurika had always participated in school events as a member of the cosclub. But if she were to participate as the knitting society president she wouldn't be able to help the cosclub. Then again, there weren't many events that required Yurika as the president, and the cosclub was mostly active in events outside of the school, so the actual change was small.

She won't dress up as a magical girl!? Are you serious, Nijino!?

That was when the new cosclub member overheard Yurika.

She just happened to be passing behind the bench Yurika and the others were sitting. Seeing as they seemed to be having fun, she was showing some consideration and refrained from calling out to Yurika.

However, just as she was about to leave, she heard Yurika say something she couldn't ignore. Having just heard the final part of what they were talking about, she misunderstood, and assumed that Yurika would stop cosplaying, and she rushed back to the cosclub club room.

Part 3

Having heard that Yurika was going to stop being a magical girl from their new member, the cosclub was shocked, but their first reaction was to deny it.

"That can't be! It's a joke right!?"

Everyone in the cosclub knew how much passion Yurika had for magical girls. That's why Yurika stood out even in the cosclub. They were sure that Yurika would devote her life to magical girl cosplay. That's why the president denied it, and the entire society agreed.

"It's not! I heard it with my own ears!"

Even the new member who had brought in the report doubted her own ears.

“If that's true, then why!?”

“I don't know! Maybe she got a boyfriend!?”

In the 'ten reasons for retiring from cosplay' handed down from generation to generation in the cosclub, the most common reason was ending up in a relationship.

When ending up in a relationship, the personal life was enhanced, lowering the value of cosplaying, and the amount of time that could be spent on cosplay reduced. Once that happened, the passion for cosplay would sharply drop in a vicious spiral. On the other hand, showing off cosplay to the boyfriend was common, but without any new outfits being made, creativity was lost. There were exceptions where the boyfriend was a cosplayer or a photographer, but most of the time getting a boyfriend meant the death of cosplaying.

Because of this, the cosclub despised relationships, and when the new member said that she got a boyfriend, the temperature in the room seemingly dropped.

“Now that you mention it, there was a famous lady-killer in Nijino-san's class”

”You mean Mackenzie-senpai? … That can't be, he's going out with someone right now”

”You never know... all men are beasts”

The cosclub girls began gossiping. The target of their gossip was Kenji, as his bad reputation with women had spread across the school.

“Everyone please calm down!”

Seeing her companions shaken up, the former president raised her voice. As she had supported the society for years, the others deeply trusted her, making them stop their gossip and turn towards her.

“Even if Yurika-chan's words are the truth, we still don't know the reason! Before we panic we have to confirm that!”

Even if what Yurika said was the truth, the reason was unclear. If she really was in a relationship that would be a big problem, but it might also be due to family circumstances. Rather than running wild with rumors, confirming the truth came first. Everyone agreed with this, and as a result, the cosclub girls calmed down.

“But senpai, how are we supposed to confirm it?”

The new president continued on. This was also one of the pieces of wisdom passed down within the cosclub, but directly asking if someone was in a relationship never gave an answer. In most cases, it was covered up.

“Fufufu, we are cosplayers. So we only need to investigate Yurika-chan's personal life the way cosplayers do!”

The girls belonged to the cosplay society. Taking full advantage of their abilities, disguising themselves was easy. So it wouldn't be that hard for them to secretly look up Yurika's personal life.

Police, nurse, store clerk, waitress and more. The cosclub's cosplay repertoire included many outfits for normal jobs as well, and many of them were kept in the club room. The girls picked out their outfits and began pursuing Yurika. They would get closer to the truth by peeking at her

personal life rather than cross-examining her in person. Since this might be a betrayal by their ideological leader, the girls' morale was high.

Part 4

“Hey, Satomi-san, a bunch of beautiful flowers are blooming”

“So it's already Autumn huh...”

“I wonder if you can eat them”

“Don't just think about eating!! Is that the only thing that's ever on your mind!?”

“But, I never know when I'll return to a poor life”

“You won't be poor any more”

“... Uhm, uhm, i-is that because... you will always support me?”

“...”

“U-Uhm... uhm... ehehehe”

“... Stop asking stupid questions and let's go”

“For taiyaki right? Ehe, ehehehe”

“What part of Sakuraba-senpai's body is so weak anyways?”

“Rather than a specific part, it's all of it. There's no reserve strength for overworking her body.”

“... So that's why she collapses if she's running around...”

“But there's no need to worry anymore”

“Eh?”

“You're always with her so I don't have to worry”

“Satomi-san...”

“Am I wrong? You're best friends right?”

“... N-No, you're not wrong! Nijino Yurika will do her best!”

“Very good”

“Hey, Satomi-san”

“Hm?”

“You're somehow very gentle right now”

“This isn't the kind of topic you can make fun of after all”

“Then, can I hold your hand until Sakuraba-senpai is done with her examination?”

“... Do what you want”

“Okay!”

“Sakuraba-senpai, it's taiyaki! Taiyaki! La la la~♪”

“Yurika-san is in high spirits. Did something happen?”

“Nothing in particular”

“It doesn't look like that though”

”Yurika was worried about your health, so I told her that there's no need to worry because since she's always with you as your best friend. And she's been like that ever since”

“Then say something happened, geez... fufufu”

”... I don't understand the woman's heart”

”Yurika-san loves you because you do what you have to even though you don't understand. If you were someone that calculated his every move, she wouldn't fall in love with you”

”Sakuraba-senpai...”

”Of course, that goes for me too”

”...”

”Come on, Satomi-san! Sakuraba-senpai! Hurry! The signal is going to change”

”Look, Satomi-kun, you're being called for”

“... Yes”

”If we don't hurry the taiyaki will get cold!”

”It won't get cold before we even buy them!”

”Fufufu...”

“Then I'm off to buy them”

”Okay, Satomi-kun”

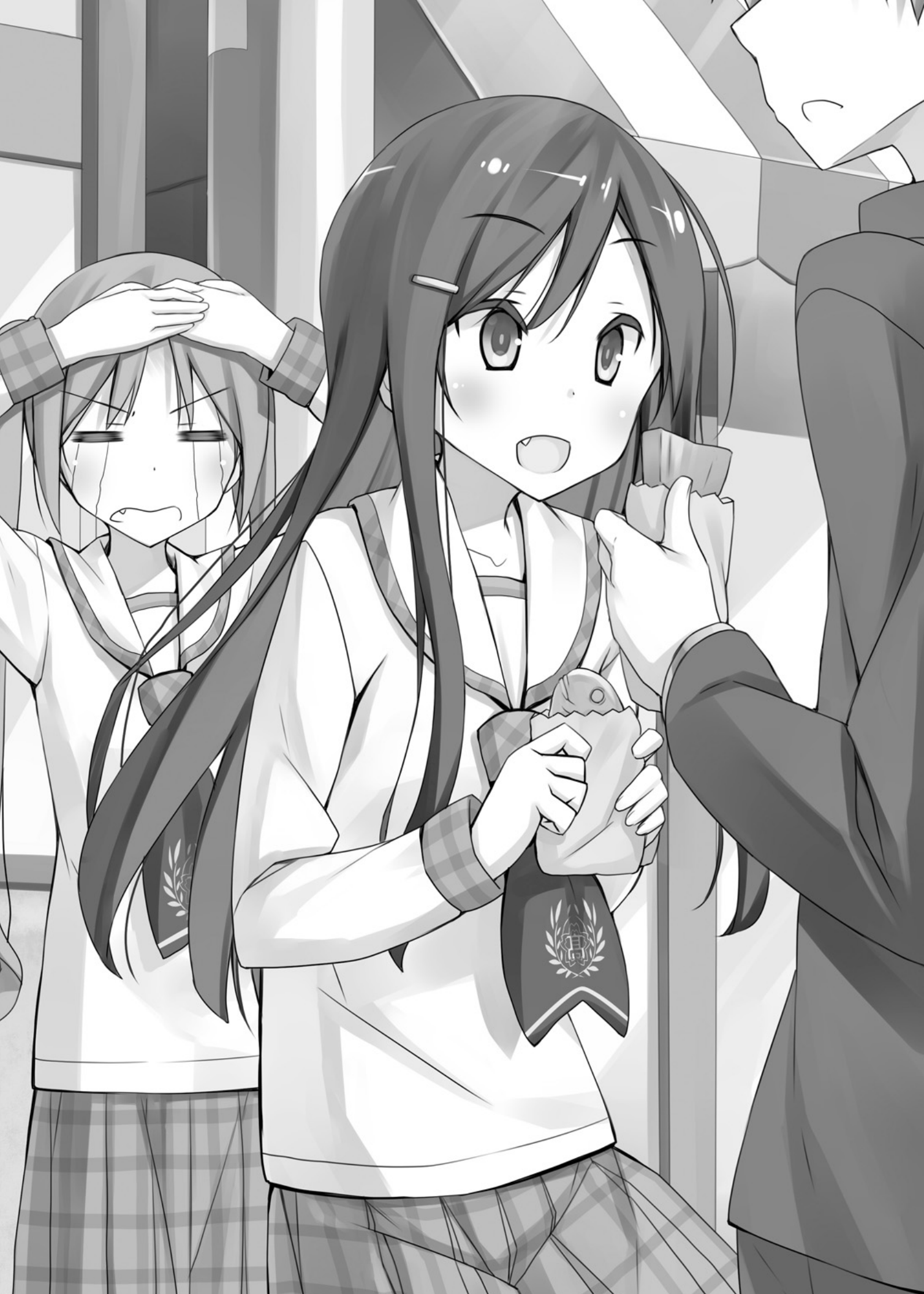
”Please come back before they get cold okay?”

”They won't get cold right after buying them!”

”You never know, Satomi-san, you always bully me whenever you can”

”You idiot!”

Thud.



“Ow!? See!!”

”You brought it on yourself. Well, I'm really going now”

”... Geez... he always turns to violence right away...”

”Fufu”

“It's not something to laugh about”

”But, you love him right?”

”... Uhh... Yes...”

”What part of Satomi-kun do you love, Yurika-san?”

“... Uhm... Satomi-san knows about all of my bad sides, but he still needs me... he doesn't really put it into words though...”

”Satomi-kun is a boy so I'm sure it's hard for him to say it. Besides... don't you think it's value will drop if he puts it into words?”

“Yes... I think so too”

“Ah, Satomi-san, isn't your taiyaki bigger!? Please trade with me!!”

”Of course it's not bigger!! It's been made using the same mold!!”

”Look, it's much thicker!”

”That's because you sucked out the red bean paste in yours!”

”I'll know if I can try yours too. Mmmm~”

“Don't suck on it!!”

Thud.

“Haah... see, yours really is bigger”

“Of course. I'm not going to let you suck all of the bean paste out”

”... Hmm... *munch*!”

“Ah!? Sakuraba-senpai!?”

”*munch* *munch*... Satomi-kun, this place's taiyaki really are delicious”

“... Ah... the tail is gone...”

”Satomi-san, I've changed my mind, I'll eat my own”

”I bet you have!!”

Part 5

However, the cosclub girls' morale was only high at the start. As they observed Yurika's life, their desire to pursue the truth rapidly decreased, and frustration took its place.

Yurika was blessed with a best friend and boyfriend, and was living a happy everyday life. That was the ideal high school life that everyone idolized.

“W-What is this!?”

”This is betrayal, this is a major betrayal towards all cosplayers!!”

“Nijino-san is becoming a degenerate! She sold her soul for love!”

”No wonder she's going to stop cosplaying!! What more could she ask for!?”

”God, please give Yurika-chan your divine punishment!!”

Compared to Yurika, what were they doing? It was only obvious that the cosclub girls' would get even more irritated.

“E-Everyone, calm down, it's still not for certain”

The new president tried to calm down her companions. With her responsibilities as president, she had just barely been able to keep her cool. But her words alone were no longer enough to stop her companions.

“Geez, I can't take it anymoreee!!”

“Ah!? Senpai, you can't!!”

”Uuuooooo!!”

Contrary to the new president, the old president who had been freed from her responsibilities took the lead and began running towards Yurika. She was going to ask her up front. The other cosclub girls' followed, completely ignoring the new president.

“Ooooooooooohhh!!”

”Kyaaaa, what!?”

”Yurika!”

Having suddenly been surrounded by a lot of girls, Koutarou instinctively moved Yurika behind his back. Yurika responded by crawling up closer towards Koutarou and clinging onto him. However that action only served to fan the flames of the girls' irritation.

“E-Everyone!? What are you doing!?”

While she had been able to calm down a little after identifying the girls from the cosclub, Yurika was still a little scared because of the strange atmosphere around them.

“Yurika-chan, answer me honestly!”

With her eyes bloodshot and her glasses glaring, the former president approached Yurika one step at a time. At the same time, the other girls gradually closed in, narrowing their encirclement.

“I-I don't mind... ?”

Overwhelmed by the pressure, Yurika took a step backwards. But since she was still holding onto Koutarou, he ended up moving back with her. And that ended up rubbing the girls the wrong way even more.

“Is it true that you're going to become the knitting society's president!?”

“Y-Yes, I'm planning to”

The former president's voice sounded like that of a demon out of hell. Yurika's experience told her that she shouldn't cross people like this, so she obediently answered the question and nodded her head.

I see, so they came here because they were worried about that...

Yurika was still scared, but Koutarou's tension lifted. The cosclub girls' weren't planning on doing anything to Yurika, in fact, it was the opposite.

“Yurika, it's okay”

”Satomi-san? … Y-Yes”

Yurika still didn't seem to understand, but when Koutarou gently held her hand, her nervosity vanished. If Koutarou said it was okay, then it was okay. Yurika trusted in his judgment.

“So you're going to be holding club activities with just the two of you!?”

”If we don't find any new members, yes”

Thud.

“What are you being so timid for”

”Ow!? … Do you not want to be alone with me, Satomi-san?”

Having calmed down, the atmosphere around Koutarou and Yurika was returning to how it had been before the cosclub girls appeared.

“At this rate, the society will have to shut down”

“Aha, so it's not like you don't want to be alone with me then?”

”L-Leave me be”

“... Please be gentle. Ehehee”

Thud.

“I'm shorry, I went too far...”

”As long as you understand”

Seeing Yurika's and Koutarou's back and forth up close, the cosclub's girls burning fury was swiftly put out.

“You really are such a handful...”

”Satomi-san, could you wipe my runny nose as well as my tears?”

“Geez... raise your head a little”

“Oka~y”

“... Aahh~...”

Passing through surprise, perplexity and strong frustration, the cosclub girls' finally settled in on a certain emotion.

“... How nice...”

“... I wonder if someone like that can appear for me too...”

”... No way, the competition is too fierce...”

”... God is unfair...”

That emotion was an overwhelming sense of defeat. More accurately, they gotten too fired up so they ended up burning out.

Yurika and Koutarou were behaving too much like lovers that the cosclub believed they weren't even noticeable. If they were in Yurika's position, they believe they would be the same.

“... Let's go home...”

”... Yeah...”

“... Aaa~h, we only lost out from coming here...”

Being imprinted with a sense of defeat, the girls began to trudge home. However, Yurika probably wouldn't notice that. The girls knew that much. They couldn't imagine that Yurika living in such a happy environment would notice them leaving.

“You're cute if you just stay proper so take more care of your appearance”

”Eh!? Satomi-san, am I cute!?”

”Uwa!? Well that's... huh, what's with the cosclub?”

”I won't get fooled by that! Tell me properly!”

“I'm not lying. Look”

Crack.

“Kyaaaaa!? Ow ow ow, it hurts!!”

”Ah, sorry”

”Don't give me sorry, geez!”

“But it was true right?”

”Well... it looks like it. It really hurts though”

”Sakuraba-senpai. What happened to the cosclub?

“Uhm... please leave them be for a while”

Harumi simply smiled wryly without answering anything. Having stepped back and seen everything, Harumi could finally understand the cosclub's circumstances. However, she chose not to tell Koutarou and Yurika. Stopping the cosclub now would be like rubbing salt into their wounds.

“Haa”

“Okay”

The two nodded obediently since Harumi said so. Instead, Koutarou and Yurika looked at each other in confusion. They didn't know why the girls from the cosplay society had just shown up all of a sudden and then left just as fast.

“... But still...”

Harumi turned to look towards the girls leaving.

To normal people, our relationship looks like that of lovers...

That was most likely not something limited to just Yurika. To those unrelated, the relationship between Koutarou and the others probably

looked like that of lovers. Having confirmed that, Harumi felt sorry for the cosclub girls, but satisfied at the same time.

Part 6

The cosclub girls still hadn't recovered from the shock by the next day. The shock of being shown the ideal high school life was huge, and they couldn't even motivate themselves to make new costumes.

“... I'm sure that's what you call youth...”

”... Probably...”

”... Besides, it's with Blue Knight-sama...”

”... It's like she's being blessed...”

”... It's something you can see in anime and manga from time to time, but seeing it with your own eyes sure is shocking...”

“... And I thought youth was just a 2D fantasy...”

“... In the end, cosplaying is compensation for not being able to integrate that fiction...”

”... Yeah, maybe. We've noticed a reality we didn't want to see...”

”... Well... of course you'd choose the 3D youth...”

The cosclub girls were only wasting time, laying down on their desks, not doing any club activities. Having seen Yurika's happy everyday life, they became depressed as they undervalued their own daily lives.

However, that was when something they hadn't expected happened.

“Hello! Let's do our best today!”

The Yurika in question opened the door and entered the club room.

“Could it be!?”

“Yurika-chan!?”

The president and former president stood up in astonishment. They had been the only ones to stand up, but the other members were just as surprised as they were.

“Huh? What's the matter everyone? You're acting strange”

Sensing the strange atmosphere in the clubroom, Yurika blinked her eyes in confusion. Unlike before, she was now able to read the atmosphere a little.

“... U-Uhm, Yurika-chan, why?”

The former president spoke to Yurika as a representative of the others.

“What do you mean why?”

Yurika blinked again, still not understanding the situation.

“Weren't you going to focus on the knitting society because you're becoming it's president?”

Yurika understood why the cosclub girls were so surprised when she heard what the former president had to say.

“... Ah!”

Yurika realized that they thought that she would retire from the cosclub because she was becoming the knitting society president. She smiled and shook her head.

“Uhm, I'm becoming the president, but Satomi-san will be the real president”

”Satomi-san will?”

This time, the cosclub girls blinked in confusion. Yurika looked at them and continued explaining with a smile.

“He said that a male president wouldn't attract any new members, so I will be the president in certain events”

Yurika finished explaining with a smile. She'd be troubled if she had to be the president alone, but she could kind of look forward to it with Koutarou by her side. Yurika had a dazzling smile.

“S-So that's what it was...”

Yurika's words sank deep into the minds of the cosclub girls. As they did, the girls realized their misunderstanding and cheered up.

“Who was it that said that Nijino-san is quitting as a magical girl!”

”Sorry, it was me...”

”So you jumped to a conclusion again!? Keep it together, geez!!”

“Sorry, sorry, I didn't mean any harm”

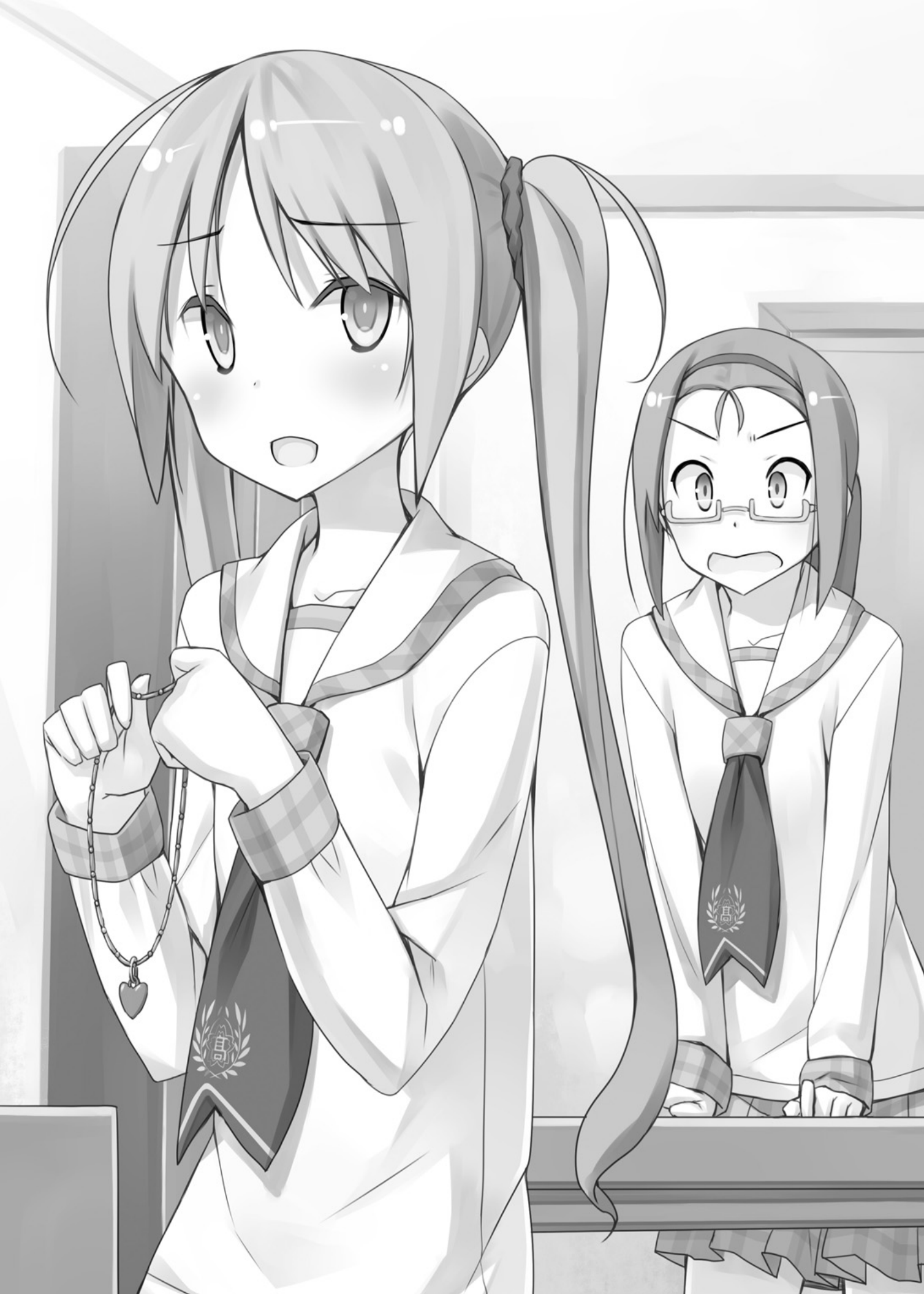
To the cosclub girls, Yurika quitting her cosplaying was a huge problem. So when they understood that she wasn't quitting, they returned to their usual cheerful selves.

“Fu fu fu~♪”

Satisfied with the girls reaction, Yurika approached a big cupboard in the corner of the room. The cupboard was filled with shared accessories and the members of the cosplay society were free to use them.

“Oh? That's unusual, Yurika-chan”

Seeing Yurika open the cupboard and peek in, the former president approached her with a smile. As far as she knew, up until now Yurika had been unconcerned with bits and bobs as she had been adamant on her magical girl style. So this was the first time that Yurika had shown interest in accessories.



“Ehehehe... I thought I should make myself a little cuter”

Yurika had a slight blush as she looked through the accessories. She looked herself over in multiple mirrors as she started choosing things that suited her.

“So you're finally going to come up with a new style, Yurika-chan!”

Moved by Yurika's eagerness, the former president's eyes and glasses shone as she lined up next to Yurika. She wanted to help Yurika choose accessories.

“I-It's nothing big like that... it's just, Satomi-san said I was cute, so I wanted to make myself look a little cuter...”

Yurika's face turned red as she spoke in a very embarrassed fashion. Yurika's character wasn't the only thing to have grown, but her feminine side had as well. Feelings like wanting to look cuter for both her and Koutarou's sake had begun to bloom.

“...”

However, when Yurika said that, the atmosphere in the club room froze over. The girls had realized from Yurika's words, that while she wasn't going to stop cosplaying, she lived a far more wonderful daily life than they did.

“Huh? What's the matter everyone? You're acting strange again”

Yurika noticed the strange atmosphere once more, and blinked in confusion again. She didn't have an inkling of a clue that her words had been such a big shock to the girls.

“Damnit!!”

”So elites are always going to be elites huh!!”

”In the end, the difference is still there!!”

”This can't be, it can't beee!! God!!”

The girls began shouting in a strangely excited manner. There were even some slamming their desks. It looked like they were taking out their anger on something, but Yurika didn't know why. Today was full of things she didn't get.

“Yurika, what is it?”

That was when Maki appeared in the club room. Maki had come because she was also a member of the cosplay society, but she seemed perplexed by the strange atmosphere.

“Maki-chan... everyone's been acting strange. I don't really know why”

”Hmm... well, isn't being energetic a good thing?”

“Well that's true... that's right, Maki-chan, why don't you pick out accessories together with me?”

“I'm not—”

“I'm sure Satomi-san will call you cute”

”— not interested. Let's hurry up and start”

”Yes”

Yurika and Maki got to picking out accessories together. A strong bond of friendship could be seen between them. As could their feelings of love for the same man. That too was yet another side of youth. That's why the cosclub girls shouted out.

“”Damnit!! So what about youth!! Damniiit!!””

The cosclub girls began preparing for the culture festival with a terrific momentum. That was because they had, through this affair with Yurika, understood that cosplay was all they had.

“What's with them?”

“I wonder...”

The culture festival was less than a month away. But with this much zeal and cohesion, they would surely succeed. When it came to their club activities the cosclub was doing well.

Ruth & Sanae in Wonderland

Part 1

It was on a clear afternoon in Autumn. Ruth had finished shopping and returned to room 106 to find Koutarou laying sprawled out sleeping in the middle of the room. It was Saturday and the school was closed. Koutarou had left for his part-time job in the morning and only returned just recently. After refreshing himself with a shower, he was showered in the Autumn sun and ended up taking an afternoon nap.

“Fufu, oh Master...”

Ruth put her shopping bag down on the kitchen and pulled out a blanket from the wardrobe to put it over Koutarou. As she did, Ruth had a calm and gentle expression.

“Achoo”

As she was putting the blanket over Koutarou, she accidentally touched his nose, causing Koutarou's nose to itch and making him sneeze. That wouldn't wake him up, but because of his movement the blanket on his chest was tossed off.

“Geez... fufufu...”

Ruth let out a giggle and sat down next to Koutarou, reaching out to fix the blanket.

“Ah...”

As she was fiddling with the blanket, trying to put it back, Ruth's hand brushed against Koutarou's chest, as if she was about to kiss him. Having noticed that, she blushed and stopped moving.

Uhm, this... isn't on purpose...

Ruth began making excuses in her head. It wasn't like she was trying to, but being as virtuous as she was, this was somewhat shameless. To her this was on a different level from walking around with arms linked. While it was embarrassing, she didn't really want to stop. She wanted to stay like this forever, and if possible, she'd like to get even closer, to the point where their lips almost touched. Ruth's stare was fixed on Koutarou's lips and her body was moving closer to him on its own. Ruth was spacing out as if she was dreaming, creating a sweet atmosphere.

"Kya Kya Kya! N-No, I can't do something as bold as this! And in his sleep! No, no, no, I can't!!"

Just before their lips touched, Ruth returned to herself. With the decisive moment in front of her, Ruth's serious personality barely won out and put the brakes on. As Ruth thought of what she was about to do, she felt like she could die from embarrassment. She couldn't believe that she, whom she and others admitted to being so earnest, would fall so hard for a man that she would forget herself. If possible she'd like to flip over a tatami mat and hid under it.

But I'm glad, I ended up not doing something empty...

At the same time, Ruth felt relief. What Ruth wanted were feelings, not the actions themselves.

Lovers aside... even though it feels like we're closer than lovers... something like this is too one-sided for the first time...

Forcing herself onto Koutarou in his sleep was just such an empty act. If they were lovers that would've still been okay, but they weren't right now. Being so serious, she would surely regret it later.

“... Master...”

Eventually Ruth began poking at Koutarou's cheek. She believed that it was also Koutarou's fault for having been so embarrassed. This was close to simple accusation, but she believed she'd be forgiven for some slight mischief.

“... Take that, and that... fu fu... do you give up yet, Master...”

Since she asserted herself so little on a daily basis, she seemed to be having so much fun when she poked Koutarou. The sense of security from knowing that no one was watching pushed her back.

“Nnnn Nnn...”

However, Ruth stopped abruptly because Koutarou's expression turned for the worse in his sleep.

“... Oh no, I went too far... I'm sorry, Master...”

Having lost sight of herself again, Ruth stopped with her mischief.

“That's right, if I do this then...”

In order to make up for going too far, Ruth decided to give Koutarou a lap pillow. That would make it a little easier to sleep to make up for her failure. Ruth slipped her knees under Koutarou's head and looked down on his face.

This is unavoidable. He’ll be able to sleep better like this after all...

This was their home so she could actually just pull out a real pillow from the wardrobe. But Ruth was a girl in love, so she pretended not to notice.

Part 2

Sanae ran back home to room 106 about 30 minutes after Ruth had come home. She ran straight to room 106 like a bullet to show off the parka with bunny ears on the hood.

“Koutarou! Koutarou! Look, isn't it cute!”

“S-Sanae-sama!?”

This surprised Ruth. She felt like she was in a dream as she had spent almost half an hour giving Koutarou a lap pillow, stroking his cheek and fiddling with his hair. As a result, she had completely let her guard down as she hadn't expected someone to come running in. She was incredibly surprised, and so shocked it felt like someone had grasped her heart and frozen her body stiff.

“Oh, he's sleeping...”

”...”

“Hm? What's wrong, Ruth”

Sanae on the other hand had no idea why Ruth was surprised. When she had been a ghost, she had often clung onto Koutarou, so she couldn't imagine that Ruth would be surprised or embarrassed from being seen like that.

“N-No, it's nothing...”

Ruth shook her head as she blushed. She was red like a tomato.

”Sanae-chan, this is...”

That was when the 'Sanae-san' inside of her told 'Sanae-chan' what Ruth's reaction meant. Lately, she had gotten used to Koutarou and the others, and 'Sanae-san' would show expressions like this.

“Ah, so that's why!”

”!!”

Sanae showed signs of understanding, and Ruth hurriedly looked down. As a result, Sanae could tell that even her ears were red.

“Isn't it fine, clinging to Koutarou like that. It's like an anime”

While she understood why Ruth was blushing, she couldn't really understand it. Getting embarrassed at strange things only invited laughter.

“Uhh... even if you say that...”

Ruth was too embarrassed to look up. There was a big distance in the their values. However, being spotted by Sanae was the silver lining of a dark cloud. If it had been Shizuka or Yurika, she'd have been teased a lot more.

“It's fine if you love him. Some feelings won't be conveyed unless you stick to him after all”

“... It would be a lot easier if I could just think like Sanae-san... this was something I was born with...”

Ruth looked up a little and glanced at Sanae. After confirming that she was gently smiling, and letting out a sigh of relief, Ruth was finally able to look up.

“Ruth is serious after all. I think you should be more honest with yourself”

”This is as honest as I can get. I can't see Master's heart like you, Sanae-sama. And I don't want to go too far and get hated by him...”

”Koutarou wouldn't hate you”

”I hope so”

Ruth lightly furrowed her brows and looked down on Koutarou's face again. Despite this commotion, he hadn't so much as flinched as he continued sleeping. Maybe he was having a nice dream as he had a bright expression.

“I just can't imagine... what he's thinking about”

”Then, why don't we take a look?”

“Eh? What do you mean?”

Ruth was confused by Sanae's sudden proposal. She had no idea what she was talking about.

“You want to know what Koutarou is thinking and dreaming about, right?”

“Well, yes... but, how would I? Not even Forthorthe has technology to look into a person's mind directly”

”We don't need something like that. It's much simpler”

Ruth didn't think it was possible to do what Sanae was talking about. If anyone could, it would be Clan, but that didn't seem to be Sanae's intention.

“You astral project and slip into Koutarou's dream. It's simple”

”A-Astral project!?”

Sanae revealed her method full of confidence and her arms crossed, but it was far too unexpected for Ruth.

Part 3

A dream is just one form of mental activity. In that case, a mental existence, the soul, should be able to assimilate with the dream. And in order to do that, astral projection was required. Sanae explained this to Ruth. Since this

was Sanae's explanation, there was a liberal use of onomatopoeia and it was hard to understand, but Ruth got a grasp of Sanae's proposal.

“So Sanae-sama and I will astral project and enter Master's mind?”

”That's right. It's not hard at all”

“I understand what you're trying to say, but Sanae-sama is one matter, however I can't astral project”

”It's fine. Here we go!”

”W-Wait—”

“And we're done~♪”

“—a minute... eh, huh?”

Being in such a hurry, Sanae began the astral projection without waiting for Ruth's answer. She had grabbed Ruth's soul and pulled it out of her body, allowing even Ruth to easily astral project.

“S-Sanae-sama! I-I'm over there too!”

”Calm down, Ruth. You astral projected so it's only obvious that we'd be over there too”

“Even if you say that...”

Despite having easily astral projected, Ruth couldn't accept it as easily. She had been thrown into a mysterious situation like astral projection and was completely confused.

“Sanae-sama, did I die?”

Seeing her own translucent body and her other body not moving, it was only natural for her to suspect that she had died.

“Of course not. Just look, it's a cable”

Ruth looked at Sanae's back, and around her waist was a line, drawing from her parka's bunny tail, connecting to Sanae's other body.

“This line is connecting you to your body so it's okay”

”Ah, I have one too!”

Ruth had a similar line by her waist and it was connected to her other body. This was quite literally a life line, connecting the soul with the body. As long as they were connected through this, returning to their bodies was easy.

“Did you get it?”

”Y-Yes, somewhat”

It seemed like this was similar to the separation that Sanae was always doing. Having understood that, Ruth began calming down.

“Then this time it's over there! Let's go!”

”W-Wait a minute, Sanae-sama! What are we doing now!?”

“Ju~mp!”

However, Ruth was never given enough time to fully calm herself. Sanae grabbed hold of Ruth again and jumped towards the sleeping Koutarou. Strangely enough, Sanae's feet didn't land on Koutarou's body, and instead entered it, and being held by Sanae, Ruth traced the same fate.

“Kyaaaaaa!”

During that time, all Ruth could do was scream.

“... You seem to be having fun, Ruth”

”I'm not having fun!! Kyaaaaaaa!!”

Thus, Ruth and a white bunny that refused to listen entered the world within Koutarou's mind.

Part 4

Having jumped into Koutarou, the two arrived at a very bright space. There was nothing there, but it was a comfortable place, with a feeling similar to being bathed by the Autumn light.

“... This is... and our bodies are back to normal...”

Ruth looked around in confusion. She didn't know where they were, and her body had regained its form before she knew it. This was strange as they had astral projected and jumped into Koutarou's body.

“We have entered Koutarou's dream, so we look like we do in Koutarou's dream. Look closely, your clothes are different, right?”

”Now that you mention it, it's turned into the outfit I wear when exercising”

Seeing Ruth troubled, Sanae began explaining the situation. Because of it, Ruth was able to accept the situation. The two of them were currently in Koutarou's dream. That's why their outfits had changed into something that wouldn't be strange to appear in Koutarou's dream. As a result, their bodies had regained their form and their outfit had changed into what they wore when exercising.

“Then Master is seeing a dream about exercising”

”That's right. With these outfits, it's probably about that”

Sanae had a hunch of what Koutarou was dreaming. Since she would enter Koutarou on a daily basis, she had entered dreams with this outfit several times before.

“What do you mean with 'that'?”

“Ah, it'll be faster to show you than explain. Let's go!”

Sanae grabbed Ruth's hand and began walking with accustomed steps.

“O-Okay”

Ruth on the other hand was still unused to this mysterious situation. As a result, she restlessly looked around her vicinity. However, she didn't feel any danger. It was still warm, bright and comfortable. Enemies wouldn't come and attack them. Ruth felt like this seemed to be a safe place, and she began calming down. Once she had calmed down a little, she began realizing that this was inside of Koutarou's mind.

If this is the inside Master’s dream or mind, then I’d accept anything that happens...

She is inside Koutarou. As a result of her clear recognition of that, Ruth's fear completely vanished, leaving behind only a sense of mystery. That's why Ruth seemed somewhat happy, despite being in an unfamiliar place.

“Oh, you're amazing Ruth!”

That was when Sanae who was in the lead turned back with a smile.

“Eh?”

“This is your first time here, and you're already going to the next place”

”What do you mean?”

Ruth didn't understand the meaning behind Sanae's smile and words. Their surroundings was indeed changing, She was starting to see something past the pure white. However, she didn't understand why Sanae would call her amazing. In response, Sanae began explaining somewhat proud.

“Uhm, this is inside of Koutarou's dream, right?”

“Yes”

”That's why when we want to go somewhere else, what's important isn't us walking, but the feeling of wanting to go somewhere else. And then Koutarou will take us there”

“I see, both sides feelings are important”

There was no point in walking within a dream, they could only get to another place if their feelings matched.

“So congratulations”

”Huh? For what?”

“I mean, you're inside Koutarou's dream right? He thinks it's okay for you to wander around here. What do you think that means?”

”Ah...”

Ruth's eyes opened wide as she realized what that meant. It was the answer to what she wanted to know.

“Koutarou is not angry even though you're walking around his mind without permission. Instead he's welcoming it. That's how much he loves you. So, congratulations”

A dream is a part of the mind. Putting other people inside of that was accompanied with a lot of pain. However, if the dreamer wished to see

someone even in their dreams, if they could dream about that someone in any situation, that someone could move freely within the dream. In other words—

“—Master is treasuring me...”

”That's right. Koutarou loves you. So clinging onto him in reality is nothing. Since he'll accept you even into his mind”

It wasn't like Sanae had been able to freely enter his dreams from the start. At first she had been unable to even enter due to the wall around his heart. However after they spent time together, she gradually gained more freedom. And now she was able to go play in a lot of places. Because she knew of that change, Sanae was able to act without reservation around Koutarou. She knew better than anyone just how much Koutarou would accept.

“But... if I were to suddenly act like Sanae-sama, wouldn't Master be surprised?”

“I think so. So you'll have to change little by little. The foundation is important”

“Fufu, I'll do just that”

As the two smiled at each other they reached a new place. They arrived much quicker than Sanae had imagined. Koutarou was probably welcoming them more than usual because they were getting along so well.

Part 5

The new place the two arrived at was a riverbed. Several grounds for sports could be seen around here. Baseball, soccer, tennis, volleyball and more. The surroundings were filled with people playing the various sports. The

surroundings were still bright and warm as usual, it was the perfect weather for sports.

“I understand the meaning behind this outfit and this weather”

“It's Koutarou's dream after all”

“Yes”

In one of the many grounds was Koutarou himself. He was currently in the middle of playing baseball with many companions.

“Look, look, everyone's here”

”You're right. Ah, Her Highness and everyone else... there's also Mackenzie-sama and others from the school and city...”

They were playing baseball split up into two teams. First Koutarou and the girls of room 106 split evenly with five in each team, then there was Elfaria, Kenji, classmates, the cosclub, the drama club and people from the neighborhood association. Those that couldn't fit into the teams were sitting on benches or bleachers cheering on. It was a very lavish gathering.

“I'm sure these are all people Master cares for”

“Yeah. So look, there are even more than one of a few people”

”Aha, could that be Kiriha-sama when she was small”

”Yeah, everyone memorable in Koutarou's life are gathered here”

The people gathered here were all important for making Koutarou who he was today. That's why there was some overlap in the personnel and even deceased were included. This was a dream so it wasn't all that strict. So this baseball field was like the epitome of Koutarou's life. That was the kind of place the mental world was.

“But... I can't agree with being on Mackenzie-sama's team”

Despite understanding the circumstances, Ruth was dissatisfied. She wanted to be on the same team as Koutarou.

“It can't be helped. With Koutarou and us, that's only ten. Besides, the teams are different every time, so you just happened to be on different teams today”

“I-Is that so...”

”But, there's something that never changes”

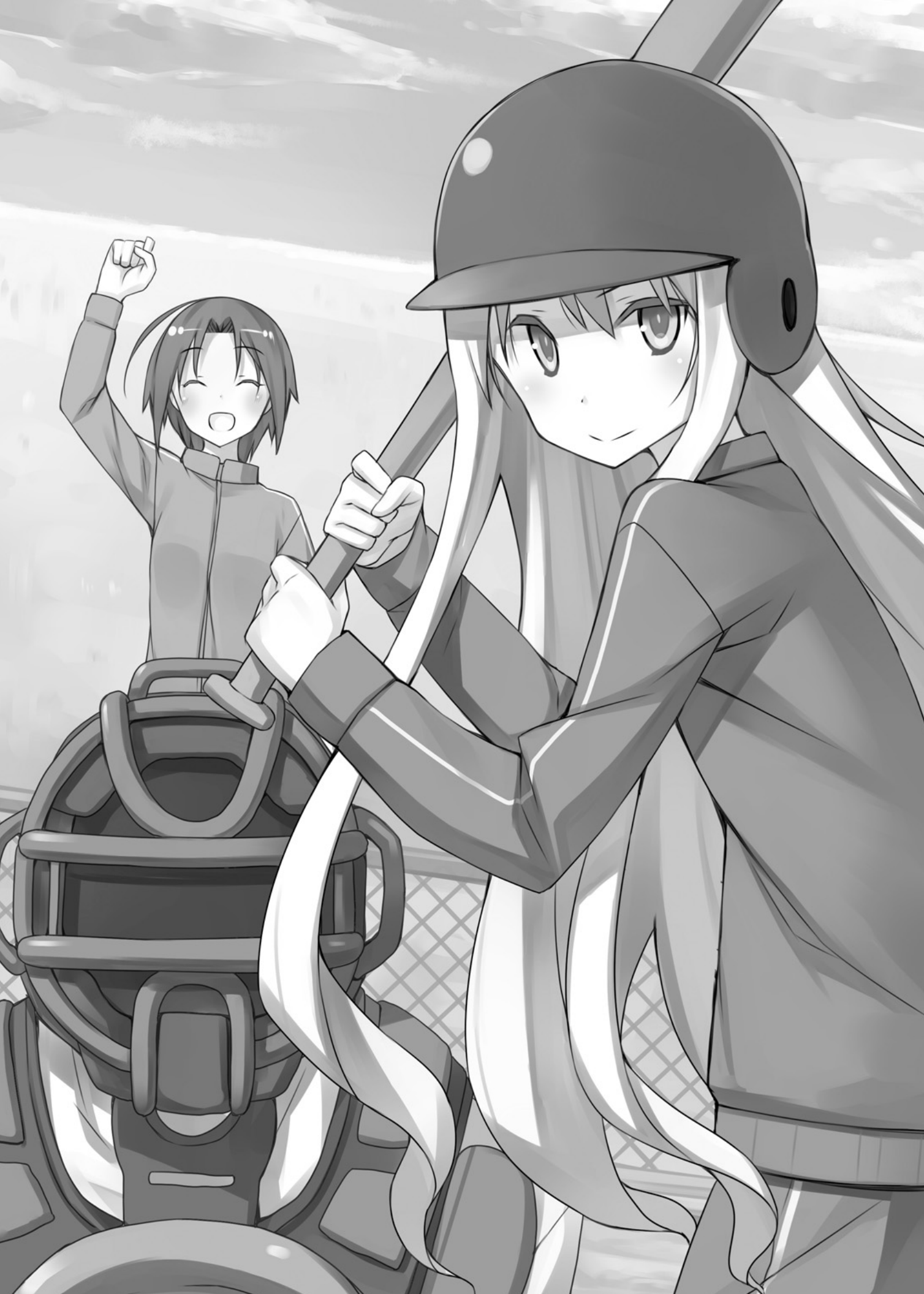
Sanae smiled wryly at Ruth's words, but her tone lowered a little as she spoke. She felt a little sad about that 'never changing' thing.

“Which is?”

“Glasses-kun is always on the opposite team of Koutarou. I think it's because he trusts him more than anyone else”

”Mackenzie-sama is...”

Including their feelings for one another as man and woman, the girls of room 106 might be bigger existences to Koutarou. But when it came to trust in people, Koutarou trusted Kenji more than anyone. That was because Kenji had been the first one to save Koutarou. That's why he trusted Kenji more than himself in a sense, and that was why Kenji was the fixed leader of the opposing team. In other words, he could entrust Kenji with those important to him.



“I'm sure our true rival is Glasses-kun. That's why we have to get Koutarou to think more of us than him some day”

”You're right. Let's do that”

In order to truly save Koutarou they needed to save him more than Kenji. Once that happened the girls would inherit that special position from Kenji. Since that was for everyone's sake, the girls had no reason not to aim for it.

The match was going back and forth. The individual plays reflected the player's characters. Yurika struck out, Shizuka sent the ball out of the park, Theia turned a normal hit into a two base run with her swift running, and Kiriha was throwing all kinds of pitches. Sanae and Ruth sat down and enjoyed the match.

“Looks like Theia is the batter again”

”The batting order is wrong, but it's a dream after all. Fufufu...”

As the two watched on, Theia entered the batter's box. She held the bat with a bold form making her look bigger. The pitcher, Kenji, threw the ball with a nice technique. Being dexterous Kenji skillfully threw the ball in a hard course.

However, Theia read that course and swung her bat. The hit ball flew over second base and rolled between the right and center field.

“Your Highness, run!”

The beautiful sound reverberating through the grounds instinctively made Ruth stand up and cheer. The other people on the ground joined Ruth and cheered. The other Ruth acted very similarly to the real one. The same was true for all the others.

“That's amazing Your Highness! Nice batting!”

Theia ran all the way to third base. She responded to Ruth's cheers with a wave. It seemed like there being two Ruth's didn't matter to her.

“Ruth, it's about time to go”

Seeing the next person enter the batter's box, Sanae called out to the excited Ruth.

“But the match is not done yet...”

”Ahaha, actually, this match never ends”

”Could it be that Master always wants to see this dream?”

”Probably”

Koutarou's wish was clear. He wanted this ordinary happiness to continue forever. This baseball reflected that. So this match would never end until Koutarou woke up.

“That's right, why don't we meet Koutarou?”

”Eh... but Master is currently in the batter's box...”

Koutarou was the next to enter the batter's box after Theia. He was currently arguing with Kenji about something. She couldn't quite hear his voice, but it was clear that it was the usual banter.

“This way”

”Eh... Sanae-sama? Master is over there...”

“Just come on”

Sanae pulled on the confused Ruth's hand and headed to the riverbed's embankment. The embankment had been made out of concrete in the case of flooding, but the upper part had a lawn laid out.

“Koutarou”

“You're here again, Sanae”

Koutarou was lying down on the lawn, observing the match while sunbathing. Sanae knew that this was the real Koutarou, or rather, the center of his mind.

“Ruth is with me today”

“Master”

Ruth slipped out from behind Sanae and stood in front of Koutarou. As she did, Koutarou showed her a smile.

“Welcome, Ruth-san”

”Boo, that's a different reaction from mine”

“You've been here several times already”

”Even though you forget it when you wake up”

”I remember it now, so it's fine”

“You should do your best to welcome me every time”

”Welcome, my beloved lady Sanae”

”Very good”

Koutarou was welcoming the two. As expected, they were special to him. He didn't mind having them visit him in his dreams in the slightest. After Koutarou had dealt with Sanae, he looked to Ruth.

“By the way, why are you here too, Ruth-san?”

Koutarou welcomed Ruth's visit, but he didn't know why she had come. Sanae who was playful on a daily basis aside, Ruth wouldn't think to enter the dreams of others on her own.

“... T-That's... well...”

Ruth blushed and looked down. She couldn't tell him that she was worrying whether or not she could actively get doted on. Seeing Ruth troubled, Sanae gave her a helping hand.

“That's because of maiden circumstances! You're not allowed to ask questions!”

”Even though it's my dream?”

”A maiden's circumstances take priority over everything!”

”You forcibly pulled her in, didn't you?”

“Ehehehehe”

”Geez, what can I do with you...”

“But I thought this would be a good place to solve Ruth's worry”

”... Then that's fine”

”Yes, it's fine!”

Koutarou wanted to protest Sanae's selfish excuses, but it seemed like she had shown some consideration, so he let it go. Besides, scolding her in this weather didn't seem right. This was supposed to be a casual and peaceful weekend.

Ruth had a cheerful look as she watched the two go back and forth, but she eventually began feeling a certain doubt. So she waited for an opening in their discussion and coyly spoke.

“Master, may I ask you something?”

”I don't mind”

There was nothing Koutarou didn't mind Ruth asking, so he easily nodded his head.

“Why are you watching the match from here?”

Ruth's doubt was as to why Koutarou's point of view was from outside of his dream. If this dream was a representation of his wishes and ideals, then he should be standing on the grounds as a player. Yet, another Koutarou was standing there, while the actual person was lying down by the embankment looking on. Ruth couldn't help but wonder.

“I know this is a dream. There's still a ton of problems to solve in real life so I can't quite act like that”

”Can't you just at the very least forget about that in your dreams? You're so awkward...”

Koutarou was observing the match as a third party because he was aware that this was a dream. That's why he didn't get absorbed into it, but rather watched on from afar. Though Ruth and Sanae felt like he should be free to do as he pleased in his dreams.

“This is you guys we're talking about. I can't forget that easily”

”Master...”

However, Koutarou's next words made Ruth realize that it wasn't because of his awkward side. It was because he treasured them that he understood that this was a dream. Having realized that, Ruth's chest filled up and tears formed in her eyes.

“Oh, that was very loving, Koutarou!”

“That's not what we were talking about. Don't make fun of it”

”I'm not making fun of it. It was a big love”

”Yeah, that might be correct”

It wasn't a personal love between individuals but something bigger. Koutarou felt like that was probably a big reason as to why he was watching the match from here.

“Anyways, I'll play once all the troubles have been fixed... I guess”

“So you'll finally be playing over there then?”

Ruth wiped away her falling tears as she smiled at Koutarou. She wondered how wonderful it would be when all problems had been resolved and Koutarou could freely dream.-

“No... I'll play in real life. Dreams are meant to be turned into reality right?”

However, Koutarou's conclusion far exceeded Ruth's desire. Koutarou probably wasn't aware of that when he spoke, but that conclusion was like a very large declaration of love. It no longer mattered if that was a love between a man and a woman.

“M-Master...”

Ruth felt like her heart would stop as powerful emotions overflowed from it. Her mind blanked out and ran in circles, and she had a hard time

forming words. All Ruth could tell was that her decision to live alongside Koutarou hadn't been a mistake.

“R-Ruth-san!?”

That's why, despite her attempt to hold it in, Ruth began weeping.

Part 6

After joining up with Koutarou, Sanae and Ruth spent some time talking with Koutarou. He was somewhat more honest within his dream and the two had been able to ask about things that interested them. With that, even though Ruth had been crying just a while before, she had not completely returned to normal.

“Master really loves Her Highness then”

”He loves me too. And of course you too, Ruth”

”Well, of course”

”Isn't that great, Ruth”

”Yes”

But despite this being a dream, Ruth began worrying about the time that had passed. It was now almost evening. That's why it was about time to go back.

“... Then it is about time for us to leave, Master”

Ruth was reluctant, but she spoke her parting words. They would meet again in real life right away, but those feelings were still present even in a dream.

“Eh~, can't we stay a little longer”

It seemed Sanae still hadn't gotten to play enough as she rolled across the lawn with Koutarou and kicked her feet.

“I have to prepare dinner. Besides, I have to wake up Master”

”Ah, it's already time for that”

But once Ruth mentioned food, Sanae's dissatisfaction vanished and she stood up with good force.

“Can't you just play when we wake up?”

“Let's do that. Alright, let's hurry up and wake up so we can wake up Koutarou”

By the time she stood up, Sanae was fully ready to leave the dream world. This place was fun, but with only three of them, it was lacking in flashiness. So returning to reality to play was a very Sanae like motive.

“Let me sleep a little longer”

Koutarou looked up at Sanae and Ruth, still lying down. Since he was the one who dreamt up this world, he didn't need to return alongside the other two. Or rather, it was impossible for him to do so.

“A little longer? Like five minutes?”

”A little more”

”Then, ten minutes”

”It's a deal”

”Very well, I will allow you to doze off for a moment longer”

”Thank you very much, lady Sanae”

“Very good”

“Fufufu... then this is goodbye for now, Master”

Ruth smiled as she watched Koutarou and Sanae's back and forth and said her farewells once more. Strictly speaking, they'd just not see each other for a moment, so there was no real seriousness in her voice. The same was true for Koutarou and Sanae.

“Yeah, see you later”

“I'm waking you up after ten minutes okay?”

”I know, I know”

Koutarou, still lying down, waved to the two and turned his attention back to the baseball game. Since they'd meet each other in real life soon enough, he quickly lost interest in them. Sanae understood that as well, but even then she couldn't help but feel dissatisfaction and frowned.

“Really, he truly is a baseball idiot”

”Fufu, don't be like that”

Despite entering someone else's dream and getting in the way, not being antagonized in the slightest was actually an amazing thing, but it seemed these two who had accomplished that were unaware of that.

Part 7

Leaving was the same as coming, and the surroundings changed in response to Sanae and Ruth wanting to return. As a result, the riverbed and baseball field moved away faster from them than their legs moved.

“This feels strange no matter how many times I do it”

”It's not as strange as your mystery warp”

”That's one way to think of it”

As the two advanced, their surroundings grew brighter. The place where that brightness reached its peak was the point of contact between reality and dream. The exit to reality.

“Oh?”

However, Ruth stopped just before reaching the exit. She had spotted something that caught her interest.

“What is it?”

“Sanae-sama, what is that?”

Ruth had found a black mass. It was far away, and because of the white light, it was hard to get a grasp of its size. However once noticed, it was hard to ignore.

“Ah, that's the part of Koutarou that gets sad or lonely. This is inside of Koutarou's mind, so that kind of thing is here too”

Just like the riverbed from before, the black mass was another part of Koutarou's mental world. However, the negative emotions symbolized by that black color had the opposite nature of the riverbed.

“But Koutarou is keeping that away from us, right?”

“Yes”

”That's why I think it's best not to touch on it”

The black mass was in a completely different direction from the exit. It was also being made difficult to see because of the white light, and it wouldn't be strange to completely miss it. Ruth had only found it by coincidence.

Koutarou had shown consideration so that the two wouldn't accidentally step into it.

“Sanae-sama, have you ever gone there?”

”At first, I walked around without knowing anything”

Sanae was knowledgeable of the world within Koutarou now, but at first she was clueless. She had also carelessly stepped into hard parts of his mind. This black mass was one of those, and because of that she was knowledgeable of it.

“That's why you knew about it?”

”Yeah. But I turned back halfways. The black thing pushes you back with a lot of force. I felt like I was going to get crushed, so I ran away”

The two left the path and headed towards the black mass. As they got closer, it became clear that it wasn't a solid mass, but something misty. It was a world shrouded in a black mist, or alternatively darkness. The two stopped before it and looked at the black mist. It was big enough for all the riverbed from before to fit.

The two stared at the black mist for a while, but eventually Ruth made up her mind and grabbed her hand.

“Sanae-sama, why don't you challenge it one more time, together with me?”

Challenging it one more time, that meant to enter this black mist. Sanae was surprised by that proposal and instinctively let out a hysterical scream.

“Eh!? It's dangerous!!”

Sanae was against it. She felt sorry for touching Koutarou's painful parts, and moreover, she believed the pressure from the black mist was dangerous.

“I know. But... thinking of Master and our future, I believe it's a problem we can't avoid”

“That might be true, but...”

Ruth had made the proposal well aware of the danger. Dealing with the problem of Koutarou's past was unavoidable. Sanae knew that, but having felt the danger herself, she was indecisive. However, Ruth had another reason for thinking they should enter.

“Besides... I'm sure Master wishes for it too”

“How can you tell?”

“Because it was easy for us to come here”

”I see. If he really didn't want to, we wouldn't be able to get close... Koutarou wants to do something about it too.”

”Yes.”

If Koutarou really didn't want Ruth and Sanae to touch the black mist, he wouldn't want them to get close. This was the world Koutarou could freely control. That's why it was kept in a place where it could barely be seen, and if could be approached if one wished to. It was a sign of Koutarou's true intentions.

“... Master, we will do our best, so please accept us...”

“You're completely useless without us, geez”

Ruth and Sanae held hands and stepped into the black mist. The darkness of Koutarou's mind was deep. Only Maki, who had a similar darkness in her mind, had been able to see this far. Even for Maki, that was only possible with the help of Signaltin, so this was the first time someone tried to reach that place with just their own strength.

“Kuh, t-this is...”

“Keep it together, Ruth!”

For each step, the black mist deepened. And as the mist got deepened, the two were assaulted by two forces. Pressure trying to crush them, and a repulsion trying to throw them out. This was Koutarou's mind screaming, trying to get them to stop and turn back.

“B-But, it might be weaker than before...”

”Master is t-trying his hardest too”

“Y-Yeah”

The two held hands as they moved forwards through the black mist, the darkness of the mind. The pressure and repulsion was strong, but because they were together they were able to endure. The two desperately struggled forward, supporting one another.

“M-Master, it will, be okay”

”You're not, alone, anymore, just rely, on us, more”

Just like they had been able to see baseball at the riverbed, they could catch glimpses of the unfortunate accident Koutarou had experienced in the past here. This was when his mother had pushed away Koutarou and gotten hit by a car herself. Because of that, his relationship with his father turned sour, and their family collapsed. Because this was something Koutarou wanted to

avoid looking at, these events were like shuffled cards, appearing completely out of order. But even that was enough to convey the sorrow. That's why the two continue pushing forward despite it being so painful.

“R-Ruth, someone, is over there.”

”A small boy?”

Because of Sanae's and Ruth's, and probably Koutarou's as well, earnest struggle, the two were finally able to reach the center of the black mist. There they found a lone boy. He was covered in splattered blood, holding onto a half-knit sweater.

“Koutarou!”

“Master!”

That boy was the center of the darkness. The incarnation of Koutarou's sorrow. The existence that the two needed to save. The two endured the pressure and repulsion and reached their hands out towards the boy.

“J-Just a little more! We can do it!”

”We reache— Kyaaaa!!”

However, just as their hands reached the boy, the two let their guard down for a moment. As a result, their struggles against the pressure finally gave in, and they were sent flying by the repulsion.

“Kyaaaaaaaaa!!”

“We are almost thereeee!!”

In the end, the two were thrown out of the black mist unable to do anything. The boy in the center of the mist only gazed at the two in silence.

Part 8

When Koutarou woke up, the inclining sun's red light was shining on his face. The sun's light dyed the entirety of room 106 red, giving it a warm atmosphere. However, what had woken up Koutarou wasn't the red light.

“... You again...”

Sanae was leaning over Koutarou's chest, sleeping. Because of her weight, Koutarou had a hard time breathing and woke up.

“Every time. What's so fun about sleeping like this?”

Koutarou was just a normal human, so he didn't have any clear memories of his dream. Even though he felt like he had seen Sanae in his dream, he didn't think she had actually entered it. That's why he couldn't imagine why Sanae would look so happy when she slept.

“Just what kind of dream is she seeing...?”

Sanae on the other hand remembered her dreams thanks to her spiritual powers. But she believed there was no reason to tell Koutarou, so he remained unaware. Explaining would be a pain, and if he really didn't want to, she wouldn't be able to enter anyways.

“Huh? Ruth-san?”

And as he was thinking of what to do with Sanae, Koutarou looked upwards and happened to find Ruth's face close by. But her eyes were closed, and she was peacefully sleeping just like Sanae. He could also feel a soft sensation under his head. Ruth had fallen asleep while acting as a lap pillow for Koutarou.

“I see, so she gave me a lap pillow to let me rest more easily”

Koutarou understood the reason right away. First, Ruth had given Koutarou a lap pillow, but then she had been attacked by the warm sunlight and dozed off herself. That was when Sanae appeared and fell asleep as well. The other way around would make it harder for Ruth to give him a lap pillow. Koutarou was confident in this imagination.

“What...?”

Having recognized the two so close by, Koutarou felt an impulse come on. The impulse grew stronger and eventually he was fully overcome by it.

Why do I want to give Sanae and Ruth-san a hug?

That impulse was to embrace the two as hard as he could. Of course, he couldn't just do that. He'd end up waking them up, moreover, he couldn't go and hug sleeping girls. And most of all, he didn't know why he felt that way.

He wanted to let them sleep, and common sense told him that he couldn't just go and hug them. He'd feel bad doing something without knowing why. So whilst driven by his strong impulse, Koutarou asked himself for the reason. But in the end, he couldn't tell why, even after the two woke up.

Part 9

Having woken up, the first thing Sanae did was to show off her new parka to Koutarou. That was the reason she had come to room 106 to begin with when she encountered Ruth giving Koutarou a lap pillow.

“How about it, is it cute, Koutarou!?”

”Cute, it's very cute”

“What part?”

“The bunny ears and tail are cute”

”Make it sound even more grand!”

”The ears and tail are very beautiful, my lady”

“Very good! Very good indeed!”

Satisfied with getting praised by Koutarou, Sanae crawled towards the tea table. With Sanae finally having moved off his chest, Koutarou was free at last and he let out a drawn out yawn. Seeing the two like that, Ruth whispered to the now nearby Sanae.

“... It doesn't look like Master remembers”

”Yeah. It's always like that. That's why I split it up like here and there”

”I see...”

Ruth let out a regretful sigh. Hearing that, Sanae looked up with a pondering look.

“What is it?”

“In the end, we couldn't do anything...”

Ruth regretted not being able to do anything for the Koutarou in the black mist.

The black mist was a collection of Koutarou's negative emotions, and in the center was a boy sitting down. Ruth and Sanae were probably supposed to have accepted those negative feelings and pulled the boy out of that black mist. However, they had been thrown out into reality when they were almost there.

Ruth was being protected by Sanae's powers, so she remembered even after waking up. Which was why she felt so regretful.

“We were almost there too”

“Yes. But it's not something that'll go away in a day”

”Yeah. Let's do it patiently”

Sanae felt regret as well. However, it wasn't all bad news. There was no doubt that they had gotten closer to the core than before. That's why both Sanae's and Ruth's expressions were far from dark.

“What are you two talking about?”

That was when Koutarou, who had come up to the tea table, tried to join their conversation. He was quite carefree as he didn't suspect they were talking about him.

“That's a girl's secret. Right, Ruth?”

”Yes. It's a secret”

”Then I guess it can't be helped”

Koutarou chuckled and grabbed the remote lying on the table, and turned on the news.

“Turn on anime instead of that”

“Just let me see the start. I'm the head of the household after all”

“Then I'm your dependent?”

“Yeah”

Koutarou nodded right away. Sanae had been something like his sister, or perhaps even something else for a long time now.Hearing that, Ruth flashed a mischievous smile.

“Then what am I?”

”Don't you have your own income, Ruth-san?”

In Ruth's case, she had an enormous income and property, so being considered Koutarou's dependent was impossible. She was from a distinguished family of knights in Forthorthe. A small six mat room was too small for a Pardomshiha.

“It's the principle that's important”

“... Ruth-san is a dependent too”

”Thank you very much, Master”

Satisfied by what Koutarou said embarrassingly, Ruth turned towards the TV. And on the top right of the screen was a time display, telling her that the time was past 5PM. It was about time to prepare dinner.

“Well then, Master, Sanae-sama, I will go prepare dinner”

”Ah, wait a minute, Ruth-san”

Koutarou grabbed a hold of Ruth's hand as she was about to head for the kitchen.

“Y-Yes?”

Surprised by the sudden event, Ruth's heart started beating faster as she felt the warmth from his hand.

“As thanks for your lap pillow I'll make some tea. You can prepare dinner after that

“If it's tea then I can—”

“It's fine. I feel like doing it”

Koutarou smiled at the puzzled Ruth and changed channels to an anime before getting up from his seat and headed towards the kitchen. As Koutarou left for the kitchen, the left behind Sanae and Ruth looked at each other.

“... It looks like we were able to do something”

”Yes, it does”

The two smiled and laughed. They were happy they could be of use to the person they loved.

“Hey, Sanae, Ruth-san, what kind of snacks to go with the tea would you like?”

“I want the monaka[1] from the other day”

“There's also some yōkan[2] that I bought today”

“Then that too!”

”Alright”

However, the two were soon distracted by snacks, and they pushed the events from the dream into a corner of their minds. But that didn't matter. They both knew that was what Koutarou wanted.

Indigo Notebook

Part 1

Theia liked competitions because by displaying her strength she could avoid getting in the way of her mother, and instead be of help. That's why winning was always on her mind, whilst the contents of the competition was trivial. But after coming to room 106 that gradually began to change. At first she could only think of defeating her rivals, but after the first summer passed, she began enjoying the contents of the competition. That was because, by leaving her country, she had made many friends where winning or losing didn't matter. Up until then, the only one Theia could lose to was her childhood friend, Ruth. Having come to Earth and made a lot of friends, Theia was finally able to enjoy the competition itself.

“Come on, Koutarou, how about you make your resolve”

”... please”

“Hm? I can't hear you”

”Marry me please, Your Highness”

“Ohohohoho! If you'll go that far, then I will marry you, my knight!”

“You bastard, don't get carried away just because you're winning!!”

”But with this, you'll avoid going bankrupt. You can't escape without making a sacrifice”

”Tsk, you better remember this later, my honey!!”

”Ohohoho, try it if you can, darling!! I'll teach you who your owner is!!”

Theia's favorite opponent was Koutarou. In the past, he had been an inveterate foe, but now he was an absolute ally and at the same time a rival that she could go all out on. That's why Theia didn't mind if she was winning or losing. Right now, the feeling of excitement during a game and the clash of wits was more precious to her than obtaining victory. To Theia, Koutarou was the one that allowed her to enjoy a match the most.

"... So, Koutarou. Transfer the rights of the ironworks to me. That will make our system rock solid"

"No. If I give away the ironworks now, I won't have a chance at a comeback"

"What!? You won't listen to your beloved wife!?"

"What did you expect from a sham marriage made to avoid going bankrupt!?"

"You're my knight aren't you!? So at least say that you love me even if it's a lie!!"

"I love you Your Highness"

"That kind of pisses me off!!"

When Theia and Koutarou played games and quizzes they gradually heated up. They almost acted like children with battles of obstinacy. Their mutual understanding that they were absolute allies let them do so. Their clashes were nothing but dependence on one another, because they knew that they could show their childish side to one another.

"This is what someone like that gets!!"

Thud.

“Ow, what are you doing!?”

”Education! It's my whip of love!”

”You bastard, then take this!”

Whack. Whack. Whack.

“Ow ow ow, why don't you hold back a little!! What will you do if I become damaged goods!?”

“Don't worry, I'll nurse you for the rest of your life!!”

”You've said it now, pleb!!”

Thud. Thud. Thud. Whack. Whack. Whack.

“Guah!?”

“Ow ow ow!?”

The two's battle of obstinacy often developed into a physical confrontation. The ones watching the two fight it out always wondered, what it meant for a princess to punch, what it meant to punch a princess, and why these battles were often forgotten so quickly. This too was them depending on each other. Rather than hugging, they punched. Rather than sweetly whispering into each other's ear, they screamed. These battles was just another expression of love.

Part 2

Since the two's battle was a variant of an expression of love, Maki could understand that she only needed to show her emotions in her own way.

“... Theia-san is amazing...”

However, Maki admired Theia's method. On top of being serious, Maki was the type to keep her feelings on the inside. As a result, even when she tried to appeal to others, it was serious and conventional. Moreover, that itself was very infrequent. She was similar to how Harumi had been, but in her sense it was more centered around seriousness rather than timidness.

Maki could act cheerful around others, but her serious and introverted character would put the brakes on just before she could fully rely on someone else. So for example, when she was still friends with Koutarou, she could tell jokes, poke fun at him and give him chocolate on Valentine's day. But once their relationship went past that, the brakes were suddenly put on. Losing her mask of 'just friends', she began worrying if her existence and feelings were just causing trouble.

That kind of thing wasn't limited to just Koutarou. Many people told her that wasn't the case. But Maki couldn't obediently rely on those words. Since she had been starved for the love of others for so long, she wasn't used to enjoying it.

Maki was always worried about herself being like that. That's why she admired Theia's overly aggressive interpersonal relationship.

“... If I had even 10% of Theia-san's aggressiveness...”

Maki let out a small sigh as she watched on in admiration as Koutarou and Theia fought it out. Acting as flashy as Theia was right now was difficult for Maki. Both because her personality went against it and because the image she maintained of herself got in the way. If Maki began acting like Theia all of a sudden, everyone would be shocked. That's why she believed she could only be 10% as aggressive at most. But even if it was just 10%, being able to do that much would change her impression quite a bit.

“... This is my best right now...”

Maki looked down at her clothes before touching her own head. She had just bought her clothes the other day, and they had a calm indigo colored base, with laces and ribbons attached for an overall cute design. And on her head was an accessory with a similar design. They worked well with Maki's own impression of calm at first, but cute close up.

Maki wearing this outfit was her own expression of love. Since she couldn't actively take action, she would wear different fashion to encourage the other party. She didn't mind if they praised her or laughed at her. Being passive, this was her last resort to create a point of contact.

“J-Just what do you think a princess is... haah... haah...”

”My... haah... sparring, partner... haah...”

However, so far, things weren’t going as Maki had hoped. The other party she wanted to attract was busy with something else and didn't notice her appearance. It seemed like she'd have to wait a while longer.

“... That's right, work, work!”

If she was going have to wait, she might as well work. With that in her mind, Maki restarted the work she had been doing up until a little earlier. Maki was the treasurer for Koutarou's band of knights, so she collected receipts from their shopping and kept track of the flow of money. Koutarou's band of knight was very small, and strictly speaking it wasn't a combat organization, so the accounting book was quite thin. However, Maki held pride in her work. She wanted to get praised for doing a great job. That was another one of Maki's expressions of love.

Maki pulled out a notebook with an indigo colored leather cover and flipped it open. This indigo notebook was the Satomi band of knights accounting book. Maki stared at the notebook and the receipts while entering numbers on her calculator, but she suddenly stopped halfway.

“... Huh?”

Maki stopped because she had spotted something unnatural in her notebook. The Satomi band of knights actual organization aside, on the paper it was a combat organization, so it had a budget that could be used in one's own discretion without a need to record it. This was money used for information gathering and confidential things, or other things that might be bad to leave recorded in an accounting book. There were of course cases where that money was misappropriated and an audit would be necessary, but all of the ones Maki had spotted until now were all small amounts that could be left alone.

“... What is Theia-san using it for I wonder...”

While the usage of money didn't need to be recorded, the amount needed to be recorded so that the numbers added up. And for some reason that

amount was always being recorded by Theia. That's why Maki noticed something unnatural as she went through the account book. If the money had been recorded by someone other than Theia every time, Maki probably wouldn't have paid it any attention.

“... Though I feel like in Theia-san's case she can use it for anything she wishes...”

The amount itself wasn't a problem, and the band of knights income was coming from Theia anyways. To begin with, the Satomi band of knights wasn't something that could be publicly revealed. That's why the money being used by Theia wouldn't cause anyone any trouble. Even if the capital wasn't enough, Theia would end up being the one to amend it.

“But... now I want to know. I'll check it next time”

However, Maki was curious about what the money was being used for. Even more so if it wasn't going to cause a problem. She wanted to know the reason behind Theia's expenditure. Because Maki admired Theia, she really wanted to know her secret. So Maki decided to check with Theia directly.

Part 3

Because she didn't know for what reason Theia had used the money for, Maki patiently waited for Theia to be alone. But that chance was hard to come by as Ruth was always by her side, and when she wasn't, she would often be with Koutarou or the other girls. As a result, Maki couldn't ask Theia about the money until three days after she had noticed it.

“Theia-san, do you have a moment?”

Maki called out to Theia the moment it was lunch time at Kitsushouharukaze high school. The students finished with their classes in

the morning sprang into action. Ruth was on day duty today, so she had left the classroom, carrying the material for today's geography class. Koutarou was playing around with Kiriha and Kenji. Sanae and Yurika had gone to the restroom. Leaving just Theia alone, which let Maki ask her about the unaccounted money.

“What?”

“I have a question about the capital for the band of knights”

When mentioning the band of knights, Maki spoke in a soft voice so only Theia could hear. This was just a precaution because they couldn't explain the band of knights to their classmates.

“Do the numbers not add up?”

”That's not it... take a look at this please”

Maki said and opened the indigo notebook. She showed it to Theia and pointed out the problematic part with the tip of her pen.

“There are several unaccounted expenditures taken out, and they are all made by Theia-san”

“Uh”

Theia had shown a perplexed expression until now, but once the unaccounted expenditures was pointed out her expression changed to a more stiff one and she began sweating.

“... What did you use them for?”

”I-It's nothing special!! They're all small sums, right!?”

Theia seemingly panicked as she tried to conceal it, but Maki wasn't convinced.

“You're right that the amount isn't really a problem”

“Right!? I'm well aware of the rules!!”

”However, it seems like Theia-san is the only one using the unaccounted expenditures... so, I was wondering if you could tell me what it was for, for reference”

Maki was interested in what Theia was using the money for. She wanted to know what Theia was trying to keep secret using unaccounted money, alternatively why the reason she was the only one to use it. Maki believed that the secret to Theia's aggressiveness was hidden there.

“No, no! I can't tell you!”

Theia shook her head intensely.

“Why?”

”Why not! Besides, if I reveal that, what's the point of unaccounted expenditures!?”

”... That's true”

Theia had no intentions of revealing the truth to Maki, but Maki obtained some clues from Theia's reaction.

---It must be for some embarrassing reason...

Theia's face was red and she swung her arms around. She was excited and rattled. It was clear that she was embarrassed from her actions. It seemed she had an embarrassing reason that was necessary but couldn't be revealed.

“Besides, the band of knights' budget originally comes from me! The financing shouldn't trouble anyone! That's enough of this discussion!”

Theia forcibly stopped the discussion and ran out of the classroom. Maki simply saw her off.

---It doesn't look like I can ask her anymore... now then, what to do...

Theia had left, but Maki still hadn't given up. She thought of what she should do next as she stared at the indigo cover.

If Theia wasn't going to tell her, then Maki would have to catch her out. So she chose to secretly follow Theia, and investigate her actions. While the usage of the unaccounted expenditure wasn't recorded, the amount and the day used was recorded. That's why following Theia and recording her actions before comparing it to the accounting should reveal what the money was being used for. Maki was a former member of Darkness Rainbow and still an active magical girl. Relying on her magic she could easily tail Theia without being spotted.

“Your Highness, what would you like for dinner?”

“Let's see... it's gotten colder, so maybe nabe, it's been awhile since we last had it”

”But I believe it's better to go easy on the seasoning”

”Hm. That should make it easier to eat during this season”

“Then what about the ingredients?”

”If we make it fish then I'm sure Yurika and Sanae would complain non-stop”

“Fufu, I think so”

”Then how about meat, or maybe chicken”

”Then I'll choose some vegetables to go with it”

“I'll leave it to you... but still, Ruth, you've gotten used to Earth's cooking”

”Yes. I will need to master Earth's cooking for the future”

”How calculated and reliable”

“Please leave it to me, Your Highness”

“Indeed, then I'll leave it to you!”

“Hey, Theia”

”Hm?”

”I'd like to get a shoulder and back massage”

”... Koutarou, why would you try to make your lord do such a thing?”

”Because Sanae and Yurika don't know how much the joints can be bent without feeling pain”

“Ehehehehe”

”Ahahahaha”

”In that sense, since you're good at fighting, I don't have to worry, right?”

“Hmm, I understand the circumstances... but even then there's a better way to ask. I'm your princess you know?”

“If you get it then hurry up. I'm on the brink of deciding whether to buy a massage machine or not”

”Geez, no matter how much time passes, you're as rude as always”

“If I treat you like a princess all the time, you'll be troubled too right?”

“That's true. I will take that as a praise”

”This is what I'm talking about, geez...”

“Fufun... like this?”

“Yeah, that's it. You really are good”

“Your princess is good at everything, so you better respect me”

”I do respect you”

”I know. I only wanted you to say it”

“Mmm~....”

”Is something the matter?”

”Ah, no, it's not really...”

”You don't really have to hide it from me”

”R-Right

”Which one are you interested in, Your Highness?”

“This... tunic or whatever it's called”

”Ah, this fluffy feeling is cute isn't it”

“You think so?”

”Yes. I think it will fit you very well”

“... Nobody would laugh at me?”

“There's no one in room 106 that would seriously laugh”

“... That's true...”

“Will you buy it then?”

“W-Wait a minute. I'm interested in that one over there too”

”Please take your time choosing. Fufufu...”

“Here, it's your wife”

”Huh... did we have a golden piece like this?”

”It's to replace the one that Yurika lost”

“Hmm, oh well”

“Yes, well indeed”

“Anyways, I got a wife. Alright, Theia, it's your turn”

“...”

“Hey, what's wrong?”

”I-I-It's nothing, I was just thinking!! The, the die, I'm throwing the die!!”

”You're acting strange, what's wrong?”

“It's nothing, it's just your imagination!”

“Really...?”

“Really!! More importantly, I'm throwing the die... haah!!”

”... Looks like you're marrying too”

”Indeed. Ruth, give me a piece”

“Here, Your Highness”

“I got a husband”

“Did we have a blue piece like that?”

“It's to replace another one that Yurika lost”

”Hmm, oh well”

”Yes, well indeed”

“Harumi, what will you eat?”

“It's been awhile since I had takoyaki, but six pieces are a bit too many”

”Then how about this. We'll get eight pieces, and I will eat the ones that you can't”

”But... you are a princess, Theiamillis-san”

“You're the only one that would say that. However, you don't have to worry. You are my best friend. There are times where I'd like you to forget about status”

“... Then allow me to do that”

”Yes, I would be happy if you could”

”By the way, Theiamillis-san, when would you like me to remember your status?”

”When fighting or when I'm making public speeches perhaps”

”Yeah, that's cool after all”

”Right!? You get it!!”

”I've been on stage as a princess after all”

”Right. Your speech was bold and splendid as well”

”I am honored to hear your praise, Your Highness”

“Ruth, please”

”I guess it can't be helped... just one time, okay?”

“I know! I will claim that stuffed animal in a single try!”

”You don't have to get that heated up over a crane game”

“I want to put it next to that rabbit that Koutarou got!”

”Fufu, when it comes to Master you don't take a single step back, do you, Your Highness?”

“... I-If I was as cute as the other girls... then... anyways, that's why I can't lose in a match!!”

”I think you're cute enough as it is, Your Highness”

“You only feel like that because you're my childhood friend!”

“I don't think that's the case”

”... In regards to this matter, I am not all that confident...”

“Then for the time being, let's return home with that stuffed animal”

”Ruth...”

”This is what money is for. Let's not stop at one try, but as many as it takes”

“Well said!! Let's go!!”

Part 4

Maki hid herself using magic and shadowed and observed Theia. Of course, Theia remembered her conversation with Maki, so she avoided from using the unaccounted expenditures for a while. As a result, she was expecting a drawn out battle between them, and it took three weeks before Maki caught out Theia.

In the afternoon of a certain day, Maki went to analyzing all of the information she had gathered. She currently had two leads in front of her. The accounting book for the band of knights and the recorded notes of Theia's action the past three weeks.

"... Since she was that embarrassed... maybe it's about growing taller or making her breasts bigger? But, I can't imagine she'd use Earth technology for that... and if her appearance changes, there's no point in concealing the usage of money... hmm..."

Maki imagined Theia's feelings as she compared the two leads. If she gathered enough information, comparing these two leads should lead to revealing the mystery behind Theia's unaccounted expenditures.

"... Ah!? Could this be it!?"

After deliberate comparison of the notes and accounting book, she found out that the same day Theia purchased something at a certain store, the unaccounted expenditure had been used. The amount matched up, so it was likely that the band of knights' capital was being used for that.

"Alright, as long as I have this evidence!"

Maki restrained her rash feelings as she waited for the chime to ring and signal the end of class. She had enough evidence. This time she even knew what Theia had bought. There was no longer any way to hide it. Theia shouldn't be able to escape from Maki's pursuit.

The moment Theia saw Maki approaching with her indigo notebook in hand, her expression stiffened and she tried to escape. However, Theia couldn't escape from Maki. Just before she could get up from her chair, Maki had grabbed her arm.

“Theia-san”

”Ugh”

That was when Theia gave up on escaping. Her shoulders dropped and she slowly turned towards Maki with a frightened look. Her expression lacked her usual confidence.

“This way”

“...”

Maki pulled on Theia's hand and dragged her towards a corner in the classroom. Since they expected the topic to confuse the other classmates, Theia didn't resist.

“This time I'll have you tell me”

“I-I told you I have no intention of doing that”

Theia's first act of resistance started when they began talking. With a flustered condition, Theia rejected to discuss in the first place. It was something she really didn't want to talk about.

“I already know what you're using the unaccounted expenditures on”

“You've already found out that much!?”

Theia's eyes opened wide in surprise. Theia knew that Maki had started catching on, but she didn't think that she knew that much. Maki gently persuaded Theia.

“It's not like I want to punish or corner you, Theia-san. But... I want to know the reason for your strange use of the unaccounted expenditures”

”Uhh...”

Theia instinctively flinched. It was a gesture very unlike her.

“Theia-san, why are you using the unaccounted expenditures to buy clothes and accessories? Seeing as you supply the capital to begin with, I don't understand the reason as to why you'd do that”

The unaccounted expenditures in question were being used by Theia to purchase clothes and accessories. But that was a strange thing. Theia personally supplied the band of knights with capital, so she could simply just buy them normally and nothing would change. If she used large amounts through the band of knights to bribe or sabotage that would be one thing, but Maki couldn't imagine any reason for why she'd use the unaccounted expenditures to buy clothes and accessories. She only saw it as something completely meaningless. That's why Maki was confused and wanted to hear the truth from Theia. If anything, had it been bribes or sabotage, Maki would have been satisfied once her investigation was done.

“... T-That's...”

Maki's questioning caused Theia's face to go red with shame. While it seemed meaningless to Maki, to Theia it was a necessity. And revealing that was incredibly difficult as a woman. However, Maki already knew the truth. So Theia finally gave in and explained herself.

Before coming to Earth, Theia was pretty uninterested in how others saw her. She only concerned herself with showing others her power. Her turning point was finding people she considered equals on Earth. First it was Koutarou, and eventually many girls. After intimately associating with

others Theia began considering her appearance of not just a leader but also as a girl.

When comparing herself to the girls around her, Theia realized she was lacking in cuteness. Her behavior was aggressive and her clothes were refined and suitable for a leader. She had been so focused on displaying herself as a leader, she was completely lacking in cuteness.

It was only natural she would turn out like that. In Forthorthe Theia had plenty of enemies so she had to live, showing off her power. Cuteness was considered a weakness for a leader and had to be hidden.

But once she became conscious of that, it became hard to think she had to hide it because it was a weakness. She became envious of the girls around her. The ones that especially made her feel like that were Sanae, Yurika and none other than Maki. These three wore especially cute outfits. Sanae and Yurika loved cute things to begin with and starting this year, Maki started getting really girly. She admired Sanae's and Yurika's appearance and now Maki was starting to pull ahead of her.

So Theia made up her mind and decided to make herself cuter. Changing her personality right away was difficult, so she started with her exterior. Thus Theia began spending money on fashion and accessories.

However, the problem was that Theia was also a princess. Since she had plenty of enemies, she couldn't give them any openings. Since she had created an image of a strong princess, she wanted to keep the public from finding out that she wore cute clothes in private. In other words, she needed to completely separate work and private.

That said, in Forthorthe, royals were public figures, and they were always required to be transparent with their capital. Even personal capital needed

to be declared. Which meant that Theia buying cute clothes and accessories would be left on record. In other words, if the records were examined, her image would be ruined. So she needed to take measures to avoid that.

Theia had a hard time telling the truth. She was embarrassed and ashamed, and her tone ended up being blunt.

"... So I poured money into the band of knights used the unaccounted expenditures to buy them... with that my image won't be destroyed... I know it's s-stupid myself! But even then I couldn't endure it! If you want to laugh go ahead and do so!!"

"So that's what it was..."

However Theia's attitude didn't bother Maki. She could understand what Theia was talking about.

When she first met Theia, Maki hadn't been too concerned with her appearance. In fact, she hated fashion and make-up as it concealed the real her. However, once she understood what it meant to love others, she began concerning herself with her appearance. She wanted the person she loved to think she was cute.

But back then, Maki was still a member of Darkness Rainbow. There were all kinds of conflicts involved to protect her position and image. That's why Maki had to come up with all kinds of excuses when she wore cute outfits. She was in the same situation as Theia.

"... You won't laugh?"

Theia looked at Maki with confusion. Maki's reaction was unexpected.

"I won't laugh. I've experienced something similar after all"

Maki understood how Theia felt very well. That's why she didn't think to laugh at her, nor did she get upset. In fact, she felt a sense of intimacy knowing that they were the same.

“Besides... it seems like we both have our complexes”

“What?”

”I admired your aggressiveness in your personal relationships. That's why I'd have to laugh at myself if I were to laugh at you...”

The two were quite similar. Theia admired Maki's cute appearance and behavior. And Maki admired Theia's aggressiveness. In other words, they were chasing after one another. So Maki couldn't laugh at Theia, because it'd be the same as laughing at herself.

“You...”

“I admire being able to make a fuss together with Satomi-kun every day”

”I could only ever do that, but I wanted to be like you”

“That's why I won't laugh. Though... I think I can laugh at us having opposite complexes”

”You're right. That's truly funny. Fufu, fufufu”

”Fufufu”

Theia and Maki looked at each other and laughed. They were envious of what the other had and they didn't, and chased after one another like a merry-go-round. Now that they understood one another's complexes, they couldn't help but laugh, wondering what they wanted to do. And more than anything, they were happy, having found someone that worried about the same thing.

“I can laugh, but... Maki, if possible, I'd like you to keep this a secret”

“That goes both ways. Ufufu”

”I will protect your secret”

“I will too, so please rest easy... that's right, rather than just protecting our secrets, why don't we make a deal?”

”A deal?”

“Something more active rather than just protecting our secrets”

”Hm... interesting, tell me more”

Eventually the two held hands, and decided to aim for a new goal together. If they were going to run in circles, since they weren't fixed in place like a merry-go-round, they should head towards their goal like a wheel.

It had been cloudy in the morning, but after the school ended, the clouds had cleared up. As a result Maki and Theia cast long shadows as they walked in the setting sun.

“What kind of clothes are you interested in, Theia-san?”

”Right now it's tunics or what they were called. I'm interested in that fluffy silhouette”

“Now that you mention it, your impression softens when wearing that”

”I thought it would weaken my active impression”

“You're right, you do have an energetic impression”

”Right? I want to look more womanly though”

“I get it. I used to be serious for a long time too”

”Then you may become a little more frivolous”

“Ahaha, I'll do just that... that's right, speaking of womanly, wouldn't a suit be a good fit?”

”Wouldn't that be pushing it too far? I don't want to admit it but I have childlike proportions”

”That gap might be good though”

Maki's and Theia's destination were the fashion related shops lined up by the station. The two had come to buy clothes together. Every time they found an interesting shop they would enter and discuss clothes. But, perhaps very girlishly of them, despite entering several shops, they still hadn't made a purchase.

“Hmm... by the way Maki, what kind of thing would you like?”

“I want the opposite of yours”

“Oh?”

”Since I have a serious imagine, I want to look more active”

”You do indeed have that impression. If anything I'd like to trade with you”

“Ahaha, I'd love to do the same”

”Fufufu... when it comes to active, short skirts or pants would be better”

”How short are we talking about?”

”For a skirt, 15 centimeters above the knee, and any pants should be shorts”

”Isn't that too short?”

“You're taller than me, so if you do it half assed you'll look less energetic and more cool”

”I see... a lack of commitment might change my impression”

”Indeed. On top of that, it might be a good idea to change your shoes into a pair that's easier to move around in. If you carelessly walk around in mules or sandals, you might end up looking cool as well”

Both of their aims were set high. Or rather, because their ideal existed right in front of them, they wanted to get closer to it. But with a fundamental issue of different material, it wasn't that easy. As a result, only time passed.

“It's hard to decide”

”At this rate, we'll need to do something drastic”

“That's right, Theia-san. What if we choose clothes that we can both wear?”

“Both wear?”

“Yes. Rather than going for the opposite right away, we pick clothes in the middle that both of us could wear”

“Like I said before, you might end up looking cool instead. And I might look like I'm trying too hard to look grown up”

“That would be bad as an end result, but wouldn't it be okay during the process of our change? Besides, if we look the same, that impression might be stronger”

“I see... that might be a good first step”

”Yes. Besides, it might be a good way to commemorate this day, don't you think?”

“Fufu, I see, so we'll start from the same point”

In the end, on their path to their ideal, the two chose to start at the middle ground between them. In other words, they would coordinate an outfit that mixed an active impression with a womanly one. The results might not be excellent, but it should work out better than suddenly wearing completely different outfits.

“But, mixing energetic with womanly is difficult, isn't it?”

”Culottes might be up for the job”

”Then the shoes could be high heeled short boots”

”Hm, it's starting to take shape already”

Thanks to the guidelines of dressing up the same, they were able to decide on their coordination little by little. Since both of them needed to be able to wear the outfit without pushing it, it was easier to locate problematic spots compared to when they were just chasing after their ideal. As a result, the two had finished shopping before the sun fully set.

Part 5

The two revealed their newly purchased outfits the next day. They had made a promise to go play with some of their classmates. The two changed and put on make up together before standing in front of their classmates with throbbing hearts. They had some confidence but they were still anxious of the others opinion. Fortunately, the reactions were positive and smiles of relief flashed on Theia's and Maki's faces. Only one problem remained. Which was Koutarou, who still hadn't arrived at the gathering point.

The classmates noticed their outfits the moment they saw them, but Koutarou didn't. He didn't notice until they reached their destination for today, the amusement park.

“... Huh, looking closer, you're wearing the same outfit today, Theia, Aika-san”

”You fool! Now you notice!?”

”Ahaha, we actually bought these yesterday”

To the two, Koutarou's opinion mattered more than anything. Having taken so long to notice, Theia got angry while Maki laughed. While their outfits were the same, their reactions were still the opposite.

“Hey, Kou, check a girl's outfit and hair the moment you meet them”

“Don't think I'm like you! I don't spend all my life looking at girls!”

”Well said, Koutarou! That's my friend!”

”Well, it'd be scary if Koutarou-kun suddenly started paying attention to girls like Mackenzie-kun”

The classmates were also interested in when Koutarou would notice, so they had quietly been waiting for his reaction. Having finally realized, they threw out some jeers at him. Of course, there were few people on Koutarou's side, as only a few of the boys supported him.

“Geez, what do you think mine and Maki's hearts were throbbing for”

The one with the most negative opinion of Koutarou was Theia as expected. She crossed her arms and with puffed up cheeks she looked up at Koutarou like a displeased child. Her new outfit mixed cuteness with energeticness, but Theia was so aggressive it was lacking in impact.

---Theia-san really is amazing...

Maki felt admiration for Theia like that. Without harming her relationship with Koutarou, she continued her rather extreme speech and behavior. If she screwed up her consideration even a little, both of them would probably be hurt, yet that never happened. This was a special technique only Theia could pull off.

“Maki, you say something too!”

”Kyaa!?”

That was when Theia grabbed Maki's hand and forcibly pulled her in front of Koutarou. Since she had been planning on remaining as an observer she was surprised by the sudden development. However, not saying anything now would be unnatural, so she desperately racked her brain and squeezed out words.

“I wanted you to notice too, but that's because of our convenience so—”

“Maki, are you planning on staying like that your entire life!?”

”Uh!? … S-Satomi-kun, you bone hea~d!!”

“Hm, that's more like it”

She had been positive at first, but with Theia's support she managed to squeeze out some verbal abuse. Even then it was moderate when compared to Theia, but it was an acceptable first step.

“I'm sorry you two. But it wasn't like I was trying to ignore you. I was late so I was too rushed to notice”

”Then hurry up and give us your frank impression”

”Despite your different personalities and physiques I'm impressed you managed to find something that looks good on you both”

“T-Thank you, Satomi-kun”

However, Maki's weak dissatisfaction only lasted for a few seconds as her expression turned into an embarrassed smile when Koutarou said that the outfit looked good on her. She was happy she bought new clothes.
However, Theia couldn't forgive Maki's reaction.

“Maki, don't get deceived so easily!”

”But I was happy—”

“You're too easy on Koutarou! Be more strict!”

”U-Uhm... Satomi-kun, tell me I look cute!!”

”Good, that's more like it”

“Hey now...”

After that, Maki continued verbally abusing Koutarou at Theia's urging.

---What's going on here, I wonder...

It seemed quite clear that Maki was being forced by Theia, but she didn't seem to dislike it. If anything she looked like she had fun.

“Go tell that idiot off some more”

“You're so serious, Satomi-kun!”

”Is that supposed to be verbal abuse?”

“U-Uhm... maybe it's something different...”

Since Maki was so unaccustomed to being selfish with others, she appeared rather pleased. It didn't seem like she meant what she was saying, so Koutarou left the two to do as they pleased. He wanted to continue looking at the two energetic and cute girls who were slightly different from normal.

Part 6

As they entered the amusement park, Koutarou and the others headed towards a new attraction that was completed recently. It was a virtual game where you used guns to fight against zombies. Everyone could play it together, and at the same time they could compete on points, it was a very popular attraction with the young people.

“Alright Maki, this is where we team up and make Koutarou and the others cry uncle”

”But, I want to help Satomi-kun—”

“Maki, you can help him any time, however there are only a few times when you get a chance to face him up front! This is where you should be going all out!”

”I see... that is very informative”

Even here, Maki and Theia decided to team up to fight against Koutarou. In order to defeat Koutarou and Kenji, they needed to work together.

There was actually a clear reason for why Maki and Theia worked together and dressed the same. That was because of the deal they had made on the day Theia had revealed the reason behind her use of the unaccounted expenditures.

The deal was that Maki would help Theia get cuter. With that, Theia stopped using the band of knights capital to buy clothes and instead, it was

decided that Maki would give the clothes to Theia as a present. With that, the safety of the accounting books increased even more, and on top of that Maki could advise Theia on cute clothes. Theia's fashion sense wasn't that bad, but when it came to Earth fashion, she was inexperienced. Maki being with her was very welcome.

And in return, Theia would teach Maki about aggressive relationships. Since Maki had a serious and introverted personality, she was bad at being active around those she was close to. So Theia would support her in her endeavors. To Maki, this was a big chance to improve on her faults.

In short, the deal the two had made consisted of Maki teaching Theia about cuteness and Theia teaching Maki about extremes. It was a positive deal that would help both of them make up for what they were lacking.

“I will prioritize defeating enemies with weapons. I want you to keep the other enemies from getting close”

”I understand. Let's call out when we need to reload”

”Got it! Then let's go!”

”Yes, let's do our best!”

The two challenged the attraction together. As they stood lined up by the starting point, their expressions were brighter and more cheerful than ever. While their intentions might have started out differently, there was no longer any doubt that the two were closer than ever before.

The Great War in Inner Space

Part 1

On the midafternoon of a certain Saturday, Koutarou and the others were playing a board game they had pulled out from the wardrobe. The players were Koutarou, Yurika, Maki, Theia and Clan. Because some of the people relevant were missing there would be no movement in points in regards to the ownership of the room. They were simply playing because they wanted to. Since it was clear skies outside, the sun's light streamed through the window and into the room. While wrapped in the soft sunlight of Autumn the game slowly progressed.

“It's your turn, Aika-san”

”O-Okay”

Urged by Koutarou, Maki nervously put her hand on the game board's roulette wheel. Having grown up without playing a lot of games, she was still a little nervous even after getting more used to it.

“Ei!”

The roulette wheel spun around as Maki let out a cute shout. In the game Koutarou and the others were playing, the number given by this roulette wheel told them how far they could move in this haunted European-style building.

“... Four. Maki-chan, please move up four steps”

”One, two, three and four”

“Let's see here 'Whilst you're exploring the dining room, you hear a noise coming from thin air. Draw an event card'... I wonder what happened”

“Bertorion, the event cards”

”Here, Maki-san, draw one”

“Okay”

Obeying the instructions on the space she stopped on, Maki drew a card. The content written on the card would be what Maki experienced.

“Uhm 'A knight in armor suddenly attacks! … Or so you thought, but it was just a decoration left in the room. Nothing in particular happens' is what it says”

“Lucky”

”That might not be the case. If an enemy appears you might get some treasure”

”Yurika, you're on the safety first side, aren't you”

”If you die then everything is for nothing after all. Treasure and food are only useful if you're alive”

The girls were split on how to interpret the event. Listening in on them, Koutarou felt like the different interpretations fit the girls perfectly.

“Fufu”

That was when Maki began laughing.

“What is it, Aika-san?”

”Don't you think the horror in this game is lame?”

“Hm? Yeah, you're right”

“But when I imagined Satomi-kun attacking me... I couldn't help but find it funny”

“Ah, that's what you meant”

When mentioning a knight in armor, the first one to pop up in the minds of those related to room 106 was Koutarou. That's why, despite the horror being lame, Maki instinctively found herself calming down. There was already a serious lack in tension as they were playing the game in broad daylight, but with this any remaining tension was blown away.

“What would you do then, Aika-san?”

“I'd probably scream out and thrown a bunch of things at you”

”I can see that happening”

“Then let's throw some”

”Theia!?”

”Men, begin your attack!”

“”Yes Sir”””

Following Theia's order, the girls threw things at Koutarou all at once. But they didn't want to hurt Koutarou and they didn't want to ruin the room. So they were throwing clothes, cushions, towels, newspapers and other things that wouldn't do much damage. The thing that looked like it would hurt the most was the instant noodles. Of course, it hurt Yurika the most.

How do I put this... yeah, this is hard to say but...

Koutarou couldn't really get angry at the girls when they played with such gentleness. If anything, he wanted to respond to that playfulness of theirs.

“You guys!”

“”Kyaa Kyaa Kyaa!”

So Koutarou gathered up what had been thrown at him and threw it back all at once. Being such a small room, the girls had nowhere to escape. And just like Koutarou, the girls were covered in all kinds of articles. But even then, the girls were smiling. They had expected Koutarou to counterattack like that, so it was only natural.

Part 2

Like that, the game progressed despite several derailments over unnecessary details. This time around, Maki put up a good fight as a novice, and Yurika pulled through with sheer luck and the game developed into a showdown between the two.

“Maki-chan, this is our final match!”

”I've come this far, I won't lose now, Yurika!”

Having overcome various troubles, the two now had a great relationship, and they enjoyed the confrontation as friends.

“... Yurika's only ever strong when it doesn't matter if she loses”

Koutarou smiled as he looked at the two. The fact that the two were having fun was conveyed to Koutarou as well. Considering everything that had happened, this was a warming sight.

“She's timid when it really counts after all”

Clan smiled as well. But rather than making fun of them, she had the same warming feeling as Koutarou did. Lately, Clan had started to honestly show her feelings.

“What are you saying. Even though you think Yurika is actually too strong when she truly can't afford to lose”

Theia was amazed at Koutarou's words. While Yurika was awfully weak when defeated. When punishments are given out for losing, she suddenly starts losing hard. However, when she truly can't afford to lose, in the true meaning of the word, such as when someone's life is at stake, she had the strength to never lose. And Koutarou believed that strength of hers would only bring unhappiness. That's why he welcomed this kind of situation where she can win when she's allowed to lose, and lose when she has to win. Because that meant that everything was peaceful.

“You don't have the right to laugh at Yurika winning”

“How harsh”

”Fufu, Bertorion, I bet you want Yurika to always be like a younger sister always causing trouble”

”I'm aware of that feeling”

Koutarou wanted not only Yurika, but also Maki, Theia and Clan to live peacefully as well. He no longer had any intentions of hiding those feelings.

That was when, completely ignoring the atmosphere, Koutarou's stomach let out a growl. The time was already past noon, so it was about time for lunch.

“Oh?”

“Geez, watch your manners, Koutarou”

”Sorry, sorry”

“There's no point in expecting manners from this man”

”Satomi-kun, once this is over, let's have lunch”

”Yeah, that's for the best”

“Then let's do that”

The game was already reaching its last stage, so lunch would be had once it was over. However, there was just one big problem with that.

“But who will prepare the meal? Or should we order delivery?”

The ones not here had left in the morning. With neither Kiriha nor Ruth, who usually made the meals, here, they would need to procure their lunch through some mean.

“That's right, how about the loser makes it?”

Simply deciding through rock, paper, scissors, or calling delivery would be boring. So Koutarou figured that a good idea would be to have the outcome of the game they were currently playing decide who makes lunch.

“Why would you say that now!? That's something you decide from the start!!”

Theia suddenly erupted into anger. Since she valued victory and defeat, she didn't like changing the rules part ways through.

“I'm saying it because it's now. Right now, it will either be me, you or Clan, right?”

Koutarou glanced towards Yurika as he spoke. With Yurika and Maki vying for the top spot, and the other three behind them, chances were high that one of them would have to prepare lunch. In other words, they didn't have to worry about having to eat Yurika's food.

“... You are right”

”I don't mind either”

Theia and Clan quickly caught on to Koutarou's intentions. They both shared the perception that Yurika's food was dangerous.

“It's your turn next, Satomi-san”

”Alright”

Having reached a consensus on lunch, Koutarou and the other three returned to the game. The game finished roughly 15 minutes after that.

Part 3

Maki managed to take first place in the game. She protected her lead until the end and passed the goal first. Carrying a ton of treasures, she was the top by far. Second place went to Theia, with the rule of being forced to make lunch if she lost, she improved her game by a lot, and she crawled all the way up to second place in the end. She couldn't catch up to Maki, but she easily did the best once the new rule was added, so she could take pride in her second place.

Third place went to Clan. Compared to Theia, she was more careful and more defensive, so she couldn't reach Theia in the final stages of the game. She simply played the game to avoid taking last place.

Koutarou ended up as fourth. He went out big in an attempt to beat Theia. Attempting a high risk high reward play style, he entered the treasury in the basement of the mansion. As a result, Koutarou was defeated by the board's enemies and lost a lot of treasure. If he hadn't tried to compete with Theia, he would have been a good match for Clan, but his position was a result of losing his bet.

And finally, last place went to Yurika. Despite being loaded with treasure, she was in last place by the time the game ended. Her play was enough to

dumbfound the others, but at the same time make them go 'Aah, I thought so'.

“Uhh, uuuuhhh”

”Yurika... you really are weak against immediate profit...”

”Uuhh, b-but, if I had rolled high enough to get the treasure then... uuhh”

Yurika cried as she spoke the reason for her defeat. Before the goal there was a fork in the road, splitting the paths into a safe path leading directly to the exit, and a path through the treasury. When Yurika arrived at that fork, having managed to hold back Maki and her overwhelming luck, she ended up entering the treasury just because she'd end up stopping at the perfect square. She was supported by her thoughts that she wouldn't get last place because of some danger with this much treasure on her. Just like she had hoped, Yurika managed to obtain a lot of treasure, enough to convince everyone that she would finish first.

However, that was the start of her fall. After that, Yurika never stopped at a treasure square again, and ended up being attacked by enemies nonstop. If she beat an enemy she'd get treasure, but the enemies that appeared here were strong. Before long, she had been robbed of everything she had and she passed the goal with nothing to show.

“In the very end, you lost to your greed and lost your luck...”

”You really are an unfortunate fellow. Maybe you're cursed?”

Clan and Theia felt perplexed by the unexpected outcome. They had taken measures to keep Yurika from finishing last, yet Yurika had jumped into the position herself.

“Aah... then what if I make lunch?”

Unable to see any value in a lunch made from Yurika, Koutarou offered to make lunch himself. That was because excluding Yurika, he was in last place.

“That might be for the best”

“I have no objections”

Neither Theia nor Clan had any objections. Koutarou might not be the best at cooking, but he could at least make edible food. The two at least trusted that.

“That's right. That's for the best!”

Yurika was also happy that she wouldn't have to make lunch herself. She had a happy smile that made the tears from before look like a lie. Yurika found cooking to be a pain, so she didn't really want to do it. Maki sent a suspicious glance towards Yurika.

“Yurika... it's only natural that everyone says there's no way you can cook, but are you fine with that?”

”Eeeeeh!? Really!?”

With Maki pointing that out, Yurika realized for the first time that everyone were working under the assumption that she couldn't cook. Yurika puffed up her cheeks and pressed Koutarou.

“Satomi-san, I will make lunch!”

”Even if you say that, you can't cook, can you?”

It wasn't like Koutarou was trying to be malicious. He had observed Yurika's sloppy lifestyle for over a year and a half. And during that time, he had never seen her properly cook even once. Moreover, her grades in home

economics were remarkably low. If she was actually good at cooking, that would be a miracle. It was because he thought of Yurika like that, that Koutarou offered to take her place.

“I can! I made food when I was together with Nana-san!!”

However, Yurika gave an unexpected response. When she had been Nana's cooperator, the two had lived together. That's why she would often be in charge of housework, and make dinner.

“W-Was that so”

”You're awful, Satomi-san. Yes, I can't cook as well as you, but I'm still a girl, it's not like I can't cook at all”

“Well, I'm sorry”

”Nana-san even praised me once, saying I was good at pouring up the hot water!!”

”Like I said, I'm sorry”

”I will make it!! I will definitely make you say it's delicious!!”

Yurika was completely sulking. She was a girl, so she was offended by Koutarou assuming she didn't have the skills a girl usually had. She couldn't stand being misunderstood by the person she wanted to see her as a girl the most. Yurika's small amount of pride was stimulated, giving her motivation.

“I wonder if we'll be okay...”

”If Yurika is going to say that much, we'll probably be okay”

”I can only hope...”

Maki was being optimistic but Clan and Theia didn't share her point of view. Their image of the normal Yurika was too strong, so they couldn't fully believe in her. Moreover, their sense of taste was different from Maki, who was born in the slums and lived off of anything she could.

After Yurika entered the question, she fell silent for a while. She didn't come asking for help, so Koutarou and the others assumed that Yurika actually could cook. However, that wasn't the case. Yurika was so quiet because she was at a loss over what to do. By the time Koutarou and the others realized their misunderstanding, the damage was already done.

“... You're telling us to eat this?”

”Uwaaaaa!!”

Yurika broke down crying over the tea table. Suspicious smoke was rising from a black something in the plates.

“What is this black mass?”

”Considering it's fully carbonized, it was probably a type of plant”

”I got it, this is yakisoba!”

“I see! So that's why it's somewhat long and thick!”

”Uwaaaaaaaa!!”

The black mass in question was yakisoba that had been cooking for too long. Of course it wasn't like Yurika wanted to make something like that. She was vaguely aware of her own abilities, so she wanted to make something simple, which was a good idea. However, she messed up the heat, and the order to put the ingredients in, and she was also distracted by what was going on in the inner room and took her eyes off the frying pan.

As a result, the black mass was created. It was Yurika's pride turned into ash.

“I hate it, I hate this world where a girl's value is decided by whether or not she can cook!! I hate the people who invented cooking!!”

Yurika banged the table with her fist as she cried. She was so mortified over having shown such disgraceful behavior. This was clearly Yurika's own fault, as she cut corners during home economics, but she couldn't admit that. Yurika could only shed tears and bang on the table.

“W-Well, isn't that okay. For a girl not to be able to cook I mean”

While it may have been her own fault, Koutarou couldn't just leave her alone as she cried, and he tried to console her as he smiled wryly. That was when Yurika looked up at Koutarou with a glance of doubt.

“... Then, could you make a girl who can't cook your girlfriend, or even marry her, Satomi-san?”

When Yurika spoke those words, the remaining girls all turned to look at Koutarou. Theia, Clan and Maki were all aware that they weren't that good at cooking. That's why they were very interested in the answer to this question. Their expressions all turned stiff.

“Yeah. That's not what's important. Besides, you can practice cooking whenever you want. If you think it's necessary you can just learn it. If you have something more important, I don't mind you focusing on that”

Hearing Koutarou's clear response, the girls' expressions lightened up and showed signs of relief. They then began worrying whether they should focus on learning cooking, or something else.

“Then, imagine there being two girls with similar personalities and looks, who you have similar memories with”

”Yeah”

”One of them can cook, and the other can't. Which one would you choose?”

“Well... the one who can, right?”

”Uwaaaaaaaa!!”

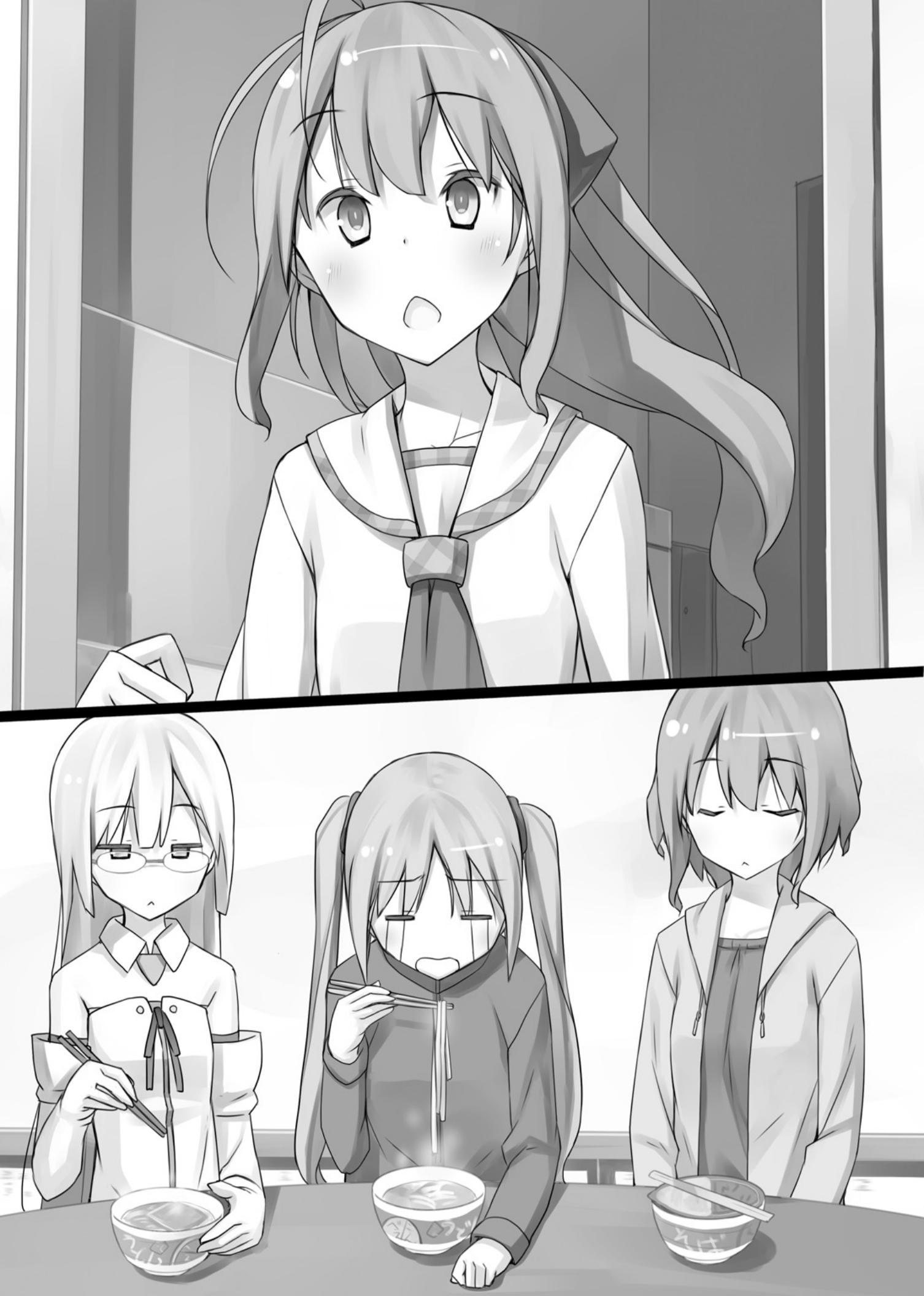
“H-Hey, Yurika”

”I really am no goood!! Uaaaaaaah!!”

However, Yurika alone showed a different response to the other three girls, and she broke down over the tea table once more. That was because she had realized that she was the worst cook amongst the girls of room 106.

Part 4

When Shizuka returned to room 106, the first thing she noticed was the smell of synthetic seasoning. It wasn't an unfamiliar smell in room 106, as Yurika would often eat instant noodles. That's why Shizuka figured the situation was the same now, but reality was different.



“What's wrong everyone!? Why are you eating that!?”

For some reason, everyone was eating instant noodles. The five of them surrounded the tea table and slurped on noodles, giving off the strangest vibe. Especially Yurika as she was eating and crying at the same time.

“Well, Yurika—”

Koutarou pointed out Yurika, trying to explain the situation to Shizuka.

“Shizuka-san!!”

That was when Yurika pounced on her.

“Y-Yurika-chan!?”

”Please, please teach me how to cook!”

And as she clung onto Shizuka, she begged her to teach her how to cook with tears in her eyes. When it came to skill, Kiriha was better, but Shizuka was part of the cooking society, so she had plenty of recipes and was good at teaching. When it came to learning from the basics, Shizuka was the best.

“Please! Teach me how to cook well enough so I won't have to be ashamed!!”

“... Satomi-kun, what happened here?”

“Actually—”

Koutarou explained what happened to the perplexed Shizuka as Yurika continued to cling on to her and beg.

By the time Koutarou's explanation was over, the other girls who were out had come back as well. As a result, the number of people increased to ten.

In order to reduce the crampedness, some of the girls used Clan's invention to sit on the wall and ceiling. It was a common sight in room 106 as of late.

“— and that's why today's lunch turned into instant noodles”

”I see. You really are unlucky, Yurika-chan”

”Uuhhh”

“I understand how you feel”

”Cooking, please teach me about cookiiiing”

”No problem. You can rely on me”

“Thank you very muuuch!”

Having learned of the circumstances, Shizuka accepted Yurika's request. She was a girl as well. She understood Yurika's feelings of wanting to have her dishes praised by the person she loved, and how she'd feel if she messed up. With her meddling personality included, she wanted to help Yurika if possible.

“In return, could you participate in the cook-off with a dish you've learned?”

“A cook-off?”

”That's right. The truth is that the cooking society will be holding a cook-off during the culture festival”

There was also one more reason for helping Yurika. That was to get Yurika to participate in the cook-off. Time was moving, and it would soon be October and the culture festival would take place in November. The cooking society that Shizuka was part of participated in the culture festival every year. By the way, last year they made a recipe book which also served

as a report on their activities. When they were discussing what to do this year, the cook-off was brought up.

Wanting to compete on a larger scale every now and then, they easily decided on the cook-off. However, there was just one problem. That was that at the moment, there would be too few participants.

Like the name suggested, the cooking society was not a club. The regulations of Kitsushouharukaze high school said that once a society had enough members, it would be promoted to a club. But sadly, the cooking society didn't have enough for that. Which also meant that even with all of the members participating, they were still too few.

So the cooking society decided to recruit participants. People outside of the society, and even people outside of the school were ok. There were no restrictions on gender or age. By doing that, they hoped to create a large contest.

“Even if I practice a lot, would I really be okay at a cook-off...”

Yurika was uneasy. She went into deep thoughts as she wiped her tears away. That was when Sanae smiled and called out to her.

“You don't have to worry. I'm joining too”

”You too, Sanae-chan? Then, maybe I will be okay...”

Hearing that Sanae would participate, Yurika felt that the cook-off was okay with beginners as well. Sanae should be roughly as good as Yurika after all.

If I’m with Sanae-chan, even if I do poorly, I might not have to feel ashamed...

Sanae participating was reassuring for Yurika, and she became more positive in regards to participating. She also felt like it was only fair for Shizuka to want something in return for helping her how to cook.

“You'll be fine. You just have to go big”

“Maybe I will”

Sanae's confident smile was the deciding factor. Yurika decided to participate in the cook-off together with Sanae. Being together with a familiar face with similar skills was encouraging.

However, Yurika's thinking was fundamentally wrong. Like she thought Sanae-chan was a terrible cook. Even if she had time to cook, she would rather do something more fun. But that wasn't true for Sanae-san. Because of her previously weak constitution, she would rarely leave home, and learned housework from her mother, Kanae. This of course included cooking. That's why Sanae overall knew how to cook. She wasn't on the same level as Yurika.

“Thank you, Yurika-chan! Let's work hard on practicing!”

With one more participant for the cook-off decided. Shizuka grasped Yurika's hands with a big smile on her face.

“Yes, I look forward to working with you!”

Yurika squeezed Shizuka's hand in return. Like that, it was decided that Yurika would participate in the culture festival's cook-off, all the while she was unaware that she would take last place.

Part 5

Shizuka and Sanae weren't the only two, but Kiriha, Ruth and Harumi would also participate in the cook-off. They had left in the morning to join a meeting about the cook-off.

“... Since it was the first meeting, we decided on the date for the event and a rough schedule on what to do until then”

”Kiriha-san is amazing you know? She calculated how many people and things would be needed when and where in an instant. It really helped because the cooking society only had rough estimates”

Shizuka explained the situation while looking up to Kiriha. She had brought Kiriha into the contest because she held Kiriha's cooking skills in high regard, but that proved to be a huge success. If Kiriha was left in charge of management, the event would surely succeed.

“Well... compared to a surface invasion, I guess managing a contest is easy”

As Koutarou said that, Kiriha smiled.

“So it is. However, but using your head is fun. Being able to continue doing this is proof of how peaceful it is”

Kiriha was enjoying the situation. Her ideal was to only ever have to use her brain for things like this. Using it for battles or invasion was nothing but misfortune. She wished that she would only ever have to think about this.

“That's right, Kasagi-san”

With a pause appearing in the discussion, Harumi clapped her hands together and smiled. As she did, the eyes of everyone else turned towards her.

“Why not have Theiamillis-san and the others participate too?”

”Us too?”

Theia, Clan and Maki who had been left out until now all opened their eyes wide in surprise. After looking at each other for a moment, they turned back to Harumi.

“Since six out of nine are participating, why don't we all participate and have fun. We want more participants too anyways”

”You're right!”

The people not participating in room 106 were already the minority. Shizuka agreed, that they might as well all join. So she spoke to the remaining three with a smile.

“How about it, Theia-chan, Clan-san, Aika-san?”

”Cooking, huh... I haven't cooked all that much...”

Theia had learned cooking as part of her basic education. However, her personality didn't go well with detailed work. And with Ruth being a good cook, she naturally left it to her. So even though she was asked to participate she couldn't answer right away.

“Your Highness, wouldn't it be alright?”

”Ruth...”

”It wouldn't be a bad form of entertainment to try your hand at Earth's cooking at least once. It's a good opportunity to learn of the minds of the people on Earth”

However, as Ruth said that, she glanced at Koutarou for a moment, which let Theia reach her decision.

“Hm, that's a fair point. It's also a good opportunity to show my power to the people of Earth! Shizuka, I will participate too!”

Ruth was correct. She believed that cooking on her own at least once would help with her understanding of Earth.

“Then it's decided! What about you, Clan-san?”

“... What should I do”

Clan had never cooked even once in her life. She had been fully focused on science, so she had left everything else to others. All she knew about cooking were the scientific components and how to push the button on the automatic cooking machine. She had no confidence in her ability to make anything herself. As she pondered what to do, Koutarou grinned at her.

“Cooking is impossible for Clan”

“W-Why!?”

”If you could, then I wouldn't have had to suffer that much”

When Koutarou and Clan had been alone, Koutarou had to continually take care of her until they could return to the present. That's why he knew better than anyone that Clan couldn't do any housework. Of course, cooking was out of the question.

“How rude! Even I can cook!”

“You don't have to be so stubborn. You'll only regret it later”

”Science is what's needed to cook! I will prove it to you!”

”Try to keep it in moderation”

”Shizuka, I will participate too!”

Clan wanted to show Koutarou up, and decided to do so by participating in the contest. She started getting really passionate in order to get Koutarou to say it tastes good. As a result, after announcing her participation, she looked to be starting up some calculations.

“Fufu, got it”

Shizuka smiled at Clan's appearance and turned to look at Koutarou. She then, making sure Clan couldn't see, pressed her right hand thumb and index finger together to form a circle, as if to say thank you for your cooperation.

“Aika-san, what about you?”

Finally, Shizuka turned to Maki. She was the only one not showing anything.

“I don't have any confidence in my cooking though”

”Really? But...”

Shizuka got closer to Maki and whispered into her ear. As she did, Maki's expression changed.

“Really!?”

”Yeah”

“Then I'm participating! I'm definitely participating!”

Shizuka had whispered something of greet meaning to Maki, which made her decide on participating right away. She was full of motivation and in high spirits.

“Okay, then it's decided that everyone will participate”

Satisfied with the increase in participants, Shizuka flashed a big smile. Adding the girls of room 106 to the members of the cooking society meant that they now had over ten participants. Fortunately, the girls all seemed motivated, so it looked like the contest should get really heated up.

“Give it your all okay”

Koutarou cheered for the girls as if it had nothing to do with him. He didn't want to interrupt a match between girls, so he was planning on enjoying the contest as a spectator. He casually sipped on his tea as he listened to the other girls talk.

“Satomi-kun, why are you acting like you're not involved?”

”Eh?”

“It's been decided that you're going to be the judge”

”What!? This is the first I'm hearing about this!”

“I recommended you, and it was agreed on by seven votes”

Out of the seven who voted for Koutarou were Shizuka herself, Kiriha, Sanae, Harumi and Ruth. Since the cooking society didn't even have five members, these five votes alone were the majority.

“Why me!?”

”Because I thought you'd do it if I asked”

”W-Well, that's true, but...”

Like Shizuka said, Koutarou had no intentions of declining. He wouldn't refuse anything the girls were serious about challenging. However, he couldn't hide his confusion from the surprise nomination.

“We had a proper reason too”

“What kind of reason?”

”Satomi-kun is actually secretly popular with the girls. In truth, there were two more votes apart from ours, right?”

“Ehh!? … wait, that's not true”

Koutarou's eyes were wide open. He had a hard time believing her.

“I'm sure you're not aware of it yourself, but... ever since the plays, you've become famous you know? So if you're the judge, then I think there will be more participants and spectators”

That was the reason for Shizuka recommending Koutarou. Shizuka put her expectations on the pulling powers of the admired Sir Blue Knight. Her intuition told her that having Koutarou wear a blue outfit reminiscent of the Blue Knight and having him sit on the judge's chair would serve as a powerful weapon. However, there were those against that idea, and Theia was their forefront.

“However... Koutarou doesn't get any love letters of Valentine's chocolate. Aren't you expecting too much of him?”

Theia's point was very justifiable. Even after the Blue Knight plays, Koutarou showed no signs of being surrounded by girls. He didn't get any love letters, nor did he get any chocolate on Valentine's day apart from the girls of room 106, and a chocolate from the kindergarten children addressed to Baron Demon. It was hard to believe he'd be able to pull in any customers.

“The normal Satomi-kun is big and scary. That's why it's hard for them to act directly. Besides, he's always acting like an idiot”

However, Shizuka was confident. When she joined with girls from other classes during PE, Koutarou would get mentioned from time to time. He should have a high potential to attract customers, it just didn't show.

”Koutarou Isn't as easy to talk to as Glasses-kun after all”

Sanae clung onto Koutarou's back as she spoke. If he was popular it would be hard for her to do this, so she wanted him to remain unpopular.

”That's right, I'm planning on asking Mackenzie-kun to be one of the judges too”

”I see. So Mackenzie will pull in the people on the surface, while Koutarou pulls in the hidden ones”

”Please help us, Satomi-kun!”

”I don't really mind, but...”

”Alright! Thank you, Satomi-kun!”

He was still worried if they would be okay with him, but he had no reason to refuse, so he nodded towards Shizuka who had brought her hands together and lowered her head. Thus Koutarou ended up participating in the cook-off in a different fashion from the rest of the girls.

Part 6

The culture festival would be held over two days. And as usual, the final day was planned to be on the Culture Day, November 3. Since the date was now already at late September, the girls had roughly a month left. They used that limited time to prepare in their own ways.

Harumi's plan was simple. While she could cook, she didn't do so daily as she still lived at home with her parents. As a result, she wasn't as good as Ruth, Kiriha or Shizuka. So she chose something she could make without mistake, within the limited time of the cook-off. She wanted to put out something she knew that the judges would be able to eat.

“What should I do... maybe I should be a little adventurous... but it would become harder...”

Harumi was in the corner of the supermarket, and furrowed her eyebrows in deep thought. While she always seemed calm, right now she was serious. As expected, Harumi is a girl as well, so she was getting passionate about the contest.

“Maybe I should give it a try... it's more positive than not doing anything...”

Harumi was going to make a salisbury steak. It was a standard menu found in any recipe book, and Harumi had made it countless times. However, just following a recipe without any twists was less of Harumi cooking and more the writer of the recipe cooking. So Harumi wanted to add her own little twist to it. What she was thinking about was what she should do.

“Alright, let's practice it once. Then I can decide on what to do...”

Harumi was thinking of putting cheese in the salisbury steak. But doing that would of course increase the difficulty. Adding something with different characteristics such as cheese meant that she would have to adjust the temperature when cooking the salisbury steak. Moreover, depending on the amount and type of cheese she used, the temperature required for melting it would differ, and that alone would increase the variation by a lot, and as the steak was being heated up, the cheese would melt, making it easier to crumble apart. It would be a bore if the cheese was already visible before the judges could even put their knife in the dish.

That made Harumi realize that adding in cheese to the salisbury steak might be beyond her skills. Which was why she was deep in thought by the cheese corner.

“If it's too difficult, I could use cheese sauce... yeah, let's do that!”

Harumi decided to try making a salisbury steak with cheese inside, and if that seemed too difficult, she would switch to making a normal steak with

cheese sauce. Rather than being obsessed with the steak itself, she could just have the dish in its entirety show her personality. It was a very Harumi-esque polite and flexible idea.

Part 7

In Ruth's case, her biggest problem was that she was an alien. When it came to cooking skills, she was second to Kiriha, but she was still learning about Earth's cooking. She was quick to understand, but she would sometimes get puzzled by the difference in methodology.

"... If it's come to this, it might be safer to make something I've made before..."

Ruth was looking over recipes in the classroom all by herself. She was operating her bracelet and stared at a list of recipes being displayed. It was a list of dishes she had made up until now.

"If I change it to display the frequency... then as expected, it would be something like this..."

If she was going to cook something she was familiar with, then the dishes she had made the most often were curry, yakiniku, hand-rolled sushi, salisbury steak and pasta, all dishes children would love. Since lots of residents in room 106 had childish tastes, it was only natural.

"Now that I think about it, Harumi-sama mentioned that she would make salisbury steak... so contest oriented dishes would be curry or pasta, or maybe even omelette with rice since it's next in line? Hmm... maybe, curry..."

As Ruth was reliant on data, she began leaning towards curry which she had made the most times. However, she was also somewhat uneasy.

“However... curry is like a national food, and there's differences between homes... that might become a problem”

There was a pitfall with curry that couldn't be seen in the data. While it might be classified the same, curry could have a different taste in every home. In other words, there were different dishes with the same name. That could be considered very dangerous.

“Alright, then let's go with omelette with rice!”

In the end, Ruth decided to go with omelette with rice. Compared to curry and pasta, there was a clearer image of how it should look. It was a simple dish consisting of a baked egg on top of chicken pilaf, with ketchup on top. It was an accessible dish with everyone sharing the same perception of it. While it wasn't as popular as curry, Ruth figured that it might actually score higher as it's image was more solid.

“Then what's important is the flag”

There was also a weapon only available to the omelette with rice. That was the flag. Unlike curry and pasta, omelette and rice could be made more playful through the use of a flag, and Ruth was aware one of the judges was very weak against playful designs like that.

Part 8

Harumi and Ruth were planning on putting out dishes with easy to understand good sides to them, but Kiriha had a different way of thinking. Rather than competing with a single dish, she was planning on placing several dishes on a tray and compete with that. Using rice and miso soup as her base, she would add on side dishes and vegetables, making something like a set meal. Though a different way to put it might be homemade food.

“Ane-san, why don't you use your special move Ho?”

”Or do you have an ace up up your sleeve Ho?”

”No, I won't do anything special. I am aiming for the ultimate normal”

”The ultimate normal Ho?”

”I don't get it Ho-!”

”A taste you'd never get tired of even if you ate it every day. And something the cook can make without change. I want to make the ultimate version of that”

Kiriha wanted to make something that could be eaten daily, and she pursued the ultimate taste that allowed that. It not only had to have a taste you couldn't get tired off, but also balanced from a nutritional standpoint. She also wanted to avoid any kind of specialization, making use of easily obtainable ingredients, and making it with normal cooking methods. As a result, the taste wouldn't be anything amazing, but in a sense, it could be considered the ultimate cooking.

“Philosophical cooking Ho-. The taste of home cooking Ho”

”But even curry and salisbury steak would be too much every day Ho-”

”Besides... it wouldn't be very mature of me to aim for the win and go all out here, would it?”

Kiriha smiled at the haniwas looking up at her with admiration. Part of the reason she was striving for the ultimate in normal, was so that the other girls could use what the haniwas called an ace or special move, easily understood tastes, like salisbury steak and curry. The time they had spent on cooking was vastly different, so if Kiriha got serious, she would probably

easily win. That's why she purposefully challenged a difficult topic, to keep the contest from getting too one sided.

Of course, that's not all to it...

There was a certain desire hidden behind Kiriha's smile. She had someone she wanted to make that ultimate normal dish for. Something that could be eaten every day, could also be called a mother's taste. Since she knew of someone who desired that, she wanted to put herself to the test. This wasn't just to make the contest more fun, but also her own wish.

Part 9

Sanae could cook in general, however, that was just Sanae-san, and not Sanae-chan. So when she began researching her dish for the contest, Sanae-chan got bored and left her body, dumping all of the work on Sanae-san. Even now, Sanae-san was buying ingredients, whilst Sanae-chan was simply drifting around nearby

"Hey, Sanae-chan, you should think together with me"

"You're the one who said you wanted to participate, so you think"

"You don't have to so mean"

"You're not a kid anymore, so why don't you start becoming independent already"

"What good it would do becoming independent from myself!?"

Feeling helpless on her own, Sanae-san continually asked Sanae-chan for her cooperation. However, without any patience, Sanae-chan wasn't suited for cooking, and she continually refused to cooperate. Sanae-chan wasn't interested in meat or vegetables, but the shelves nearby.

“More importantly, let's buy some cream puffs home! For Koutarou and the others too!”

”More importantly... can't you think about it a little more seriously...”

“You can think up anything I can, so try your best alone”

”But...”

Hearing those cold words coming from herself, Sanae-san dropped her shoulders. Meanwhile, Sanae-chan was so interested in the sweets corner that she flew around the area with sparkling eyes. But even then, Sanae-san wanted Sanae-chan's cooperation, and she began thinking of how to get her help.

I’m probably the only one that has to start from this point...

While starting to feel somewhat miserable, Sanae-san began observing Sanae-chan. From what she could see, Sanae-chan was very interested in snacks and sweets, and she seemed to be wondering whether she should get cream puffs or éclairs.

“Huh? Now that I think about it...”

That was when Sanae-san came up with a revolutionary idea. It was both a means to earn Sanae-chan's cooperation and at the same time a direction for her dish.

“Hey, Sanae-chan!”

”Hm? Are we going home already? Then let's buy five cream puffs and éclairs each and go home!”

She wanted to eat cream puffs herself and have Koutarou eat the éclair so she could taste both. Sanae-chan had a revolutionary idea of her own.

“Not yet, but I'm thinking of making cream puffs or some other sweets for the cook-off”

”Cream puffs!?”

In that instant, Sanae-chan who had shown almost no interest until now, suddenly spun around to look at Sanae-san. Her eyes were sparkling brilliantly.

“You can make cream puffs yourself!?”

”Yeah. It's not as hard as you think”

“I want to make them! … wait, can you make cream puffs for a cook-off?”

“It's fine! Making sweets is a form of cooking too. Besides, I think a lot of people will overlook it so there won't be as much competition!”

Having been able to grab Sanae-chan's interest, Sanae-san followed up on it with great momentum. Her voice was bright and loud.

“Alright, then it's decided, we're making sweets for the cook-off!”

“Yeah, let's do our best!”

”Then let's buy cream puffs and éclairs for research and go home!”

“Yeah! Fufufu”

Did she use her, or was she being used herself. The interest of the two Sanaes finally matched up, and they returned home with cream puffs and éclairs. From now on they would be challenging the cook-off together.

Part 10

While Theia had decided to participate in the cook-off, she had only received basic education in cooking. Moreover, it had been Forthorthe

cooking, so Japanese cooking was completely out of her element. Even though she understood the tastes, she didn't know how to make them. So the person she relied on, was of course her childhood friend, Ruth.

“The difference in culture is so big that I don't even know if I can be confident or not”

”I understand how you feel”

”So I want you to teach me an easy to understand recipe”

”I understand, I will show you some recipes”

”Please do, you're the only one I can rely on!”

Ruth responded to Theia's request, and moved to show her several recipes. Adding Theia's skill into the calculations, and choosing dishes with a nice look, Ruth placed a list of recipes printed on paper on the tea table.

“You know how to cook rice, right Your Highness?”

”Yes, I've done that several times before”

“Then this is my number one recommendation”

Ruth pointed out one of the recipes to Theia. In response, Theia looked at it and read the name out loud.

“Cold shabu-shabu, huh”

”Yes. It's made using boiled meat and raw vegetables”

”So it's like meat with salad on it”

”That is roughly correct. As long as you are careful not to over boil it, you can avoid the worst results”

”Then the rest would be up to how the sauce turns out, huh. Hmm... like you say, it seems like something even I can make”

Theia nodded approvingly. Even she could turn raw vegetables into salad. As for the shabu-shabu, she'd only need to choose a meat that has more room for boiling. The problem was the sauce, but she had over a month left to practice. It was a recipe that was hard to mess up, even for beginners, and it still looked good.

“However, there are some faults too”

“Hm?”

”If it's cold on the day of the cook-off, this recipe will be less well received”

“Because it's a cold dish after all”

“And this alone is too easy”

”I see... so to make up for those flaws, maybe I could make a soup as well”

”That's a good idea. You could also make it cold based on the temperature that day, how about a potato potage?”

A potato potage doesn't require a lot of advanced techniques either. All it takes is some light stir-frying and then putting it in a blender. And even then, it had a solid taste to it, making it a great pairing with the cold shabu-shabu.

“Hm, let's go with that. All that's left after that is cooking some rice after all”

“Yes. If you have some time to spare, you could also add a twist to the rice”

“Like seasoning it?”

”Rice balls might be a good idea too”

“As expected of you, Ruth. It's already shaping up into a good menu”

”That's my only redeeming feature after all”

“You're always a big help”

“Your words are too good for me”

The two then continued discussing about Theia's menu for a while. During that time, Ruth's own menu was being neglected, but she didn't seem to mind. Ruth's results were also Theia's, Theia's results were also Ruth's. That was how the two thought, so there was no point in trying to differentiate between them.

Part 11

As Yurika was learning off of Shizuka, the dish she would serve at the cook-off ended up the same as Shizuka's. Yurika could learn off of Shizuka if they lined up and made the same thing during home economics, and it was easier for Shizuka to explain. So it was only inevitable that the two would end up making the same thing.

“Yurika-chan, you'll cut your hand like that. You have to hold it like this”

”Like this?”

”Not like that, like this”

”Then you mean like this?”

“Close, look closer at my left hand”

“Your fingers are bent”

”That's right, that's it”

When it came to cooking, Yurika was a completely blank slate. However, that meant that she also didn't have any bad habits, so Shizuka was teaching her the skills necessary in order. It was hard to say that Yurika was a quick learner, but the situation being the situation, she was making up for her slow learning with passion. Yurika was slowly, but surely, picking up the cooking skills.

But how was she doing it when she was with Nana-san...?

Shizuka was wondering why Yurika had 0 cooking skills. There had been a time when Yurika had lived together with Nana as her cooperator. So it was hard for her to believe that Yurika couldn't do any housework, including cooking. So Shizuka stopped for a moment and tried asking Yurika.

“Hey, Yurika-chan”

”Yes?”

Yurika stopped as well and put down the knife. Since she had cut her finger while holding a knife and doing something else in the past, she had learned her lesson.

“When you were living with Nana-san, didn't you ever cook?”

“I would only pour up hot water, or press the button on the microwave, and stuff like that. Nana-san is a genius after all”

”I see, so that's why”

”If I packed ingredients into the fridge, Nana-san would make the food in an instant”

The division of work when it came to food was that Yurika gathered the ingredients, and Nana did the cooking. Since Nana really could do

anything, cooking is yet another of her many skills. She worked so swiftly that before Yurika could even learn off of her, the delicious food was ready.

“... A genius is a remarkable thing isn't it”

Having understood the circumstances, Shizuka smiled wryly. She started to understand Nana's actions. It was most likely much faster for her to do it herself than to teach Yurika. She then used the freed up time to teach Yurika magic. Considering their situation, that was all she could do.

“I think so too now. It looks like Nana-san was always alone”

”... As for you, let's move forward one step at a time, okay?”

”Yes, thank you for your help”

After chatting for a moment, the two got back to practicing. Since Yurika took it very slowly, their dish, pork cutlets, didn't finish for a while longer. However, neither of them were unhappy with that. They were in a situation and with a person, where wasting time was allowed. If anything, that was something fortunate.

Part 12

Maki was well aware of the level of her own cooking, and had given up on becoming one of the top contenders from the start. However, participating with the intention to lose was just too negative. So she gave herself her own victory condition and aimed for that instead. She wanted to do the best she could right now.

“Satomi-kun, what kind of dish would you like to eat?”

Maki asked Koutarou with a wide smile during a break. Koutarou sighed a little and held his head.

“... Aika-san, did you come here to do some unfair play?”

As Koutarou was a judge, asking for his preference was an obvious rule violation. So it was only natural for him to hold his head.

“It's fine isn't it? With my skills, I can't win anyways, so at least I want to satisfy one of the judges”

The victory condition Maki had set for herself was to get at least one of the judges to say that her food was delicious. In cooking, experience played a huge part. In that regards it was the same as magic. That's why Maki believed that she wouldn't be able to satisfy many of the judges. However, she might be able to satisfy one. And if it was just one, it wouldn't affect the outcome of the cook-off. The reason that one was Koutarou was to have him leak the contents of the examination later. That was the reason for Maki's unfair play.

“I understand how you feel, but this isn't something praiseworthy”

Normally, Maki should be stopped, but like she said, the top contenders were pretty much already decided, and Maki was sadly not one of them. In other words, she could either participate without unfair play, just to pad up the numbers, or participate with unfair play to at least get the praise of one of the judges. So Koutarou couldn't be too harsh with her.

“If I seriously wanted to cheat I could just use magic”

”... That's right. Okay, I'll work with you”

Koutarou was hesitant for a moment, until he remembered that Maki was a magical girl. If she really wanted to play unfair, she could just use her magic. However, Maki wouldn't do that. So Koutarou understood she had

no intentions of messing with the placement. She really just wanted him to say her food was good.

“So, what kind of dish would you like to eat, Satomi-kun?”

Maki asked once more with a wide smile.

“Let's see...”

Begged by Maki, Koutarou began thinking of what he wanted to eat. The first things that popped into his mind were things he rarely got to eat.

“Something like hamburgers or hotdogs. And big ones at that”

”You're fine with something like that?”

Maki was surprised with Koutarou's unexpected answer. Koutarou laughed and whispered to Maki.

“I'm getting three meals a day, so I rarely get any chances to eat junk food. I'm happy for the homemade food, but sometimes I feel like having some junk food too you know?”

Koutarou's current eating habits consisted of homemade dishes. As a result, he rarely ever got a chance to eat junk food. The only times he could was when he and the other guys went out to play. Which was why Koutarou replied to Maki's question with hamburgers or hotdogs.

“I see, so that's why. Fufufu”

Having understood the circumstances, Maki smiled. If she were to summarize Koutarou's request, it was that he wanted to escape from his healthy eating habits every now and again.

Now that I think about it, Satomi-kun liked traditional cola

Lately, he would drink healthy drinks, but Koutarou liked the unhealthy ones more. Looking at that, Maki could accept that he'd like junk food too.

“This has been a very big help, thank you, Satomi-kun”

”Do your best. I rarely get to eat junk food, so don't get some high quality meat and make something elegant”

“I know. The ones that are bad for your body, right?”

”That's right. That's what I want”

”Fufufu, okay”

Having found her chance in the cook-off, Maki pumped herself up. Since there would be few participants who would attack through this route, there was a high chance that Koutarou would praise her. All that was left was how close she could get to Koutarou's ideal junk food, the taste of unhealthy food.

Part 13

Polishing your skills before challenging a cook-off was inevitable. In order to create a delicious dish, cooking skills were required. However, amongst the many participants, there was one who had abandoned that inevitable approach. That was the second princess of the Holy Forthorthe Galactic Empire, Clariossa Daora Forthorthe.

“Fufufufufu... It's ridiculous to rely on cooking by hand in this age of science!”

Clan was trying to start a revolution in the cooking world using the theory she had created herself. What she was aiming for was applying nanotechnology to cooking. For that sake, two inventions were needed. The first was an automated cooking machine that made use of nano machines.

The second was nano machine seasoning that interacted with the taste buds to create the ultimate taste. With these two inventions, she should be able to create the ultimate food. Something everyone would call the greatest taste. It would become a new era of cooking.

“Something like pouring love or sincerity into your dish is unscientific! I will abide to pure science and create the ultimate dish!!”

Clan operated a computer and worked on the program for the nano machines. Her hands flowed smoothly, operating the keyboard like a pianist operated a piano, and before long she had written tens of thousands of lines of code. Yet at the same time it was a beautiful program written through pure logic and without any waste.

“Let's start with curry! However, this curry will become the first step on my way to conquering the world!”

In the current state, the nano machines were programmed to create curry rice. However, the program would eventually be expanded on, and be used in all kinds of dishes. Clan's ambition was that before long, these nanomachines would dominate the cooking world.

“Just you wait, Bertorion! You said I couldn't cook, but I'll make you eat those words!”

However, Clan hadn't noticed that her ambitions, supported by her feelings to triumph over Koutarou, only existed because of love. In the end, she was pouring her own love into the cooking, but having lost herself to wild emotions, she didn't notice that until the end.

Part 14

Just like the entrants to the cook-off had a meeting, so did the judges. Having been chosen as judges, Koutarou and Kenji had come to the student council room on the afternoon of a certain day to hold a meeting. Apart from Koutarou and Kenji, many more were gathered here. From within the school was the principal, a popular female teacher, the student council president, a known athlete and so on. From outside the school was a chairman, a swordsmith and so on. The composition of the people in the room was wide in variety and filled with famous people in the region.

“I have gathered you all here today to talk about the schedule and the progress of the cook-off that everyone is helping with”

The person in charge was the president of the cooking society. Her voice and expression were stiff. That was because she had only just been appointed president, and she was surrounded by famous people. Being thrust into a big job right away, it was only obvious she'd get nervous.

“If you find something questionable as I speak, feel free to ask. Then first off—”

The president swiftly got down to business. As so many people had gathered, the amount of time the meeting could be held wasn't all that long. She had to hurry.

The cook-off would be held on the second day off the culture festival, on November 3. At first the plans had been to make it a small event, but with Kiriha intervening, it turned into a big event before long. Right now it had become the last event to finish off the culture festival.

Considering the time it would take to cook and judge, the cook-off was expected to take four hours. Taking the season into account, it would get cold in the afternoon, so the event was set to start at 12, so it would end

before it starts getting dark. The venues would be the gym and the home economics classroom. The opening ceremony and judging would take place in the gym, while the actual cooking would be done in the home economics classroom. A large monitor would be installed in the gym to display the progress of the participants in real time. The judges would be observing them from their seats made for them on the gym's platform.

In total there were 24 participants of the cook-off, gathered from inside and outside of the school. Age, gender and occupation are all varied, and there were even pros amongst them. They were the strongest contenders, gathered to prove that they were the best cook.

The rules of the cook-off were simple. Cooking had to be completed and judged within three hours. Ingredients were prepared for them, but prior preparation or bringing in your own ingredients was allowed to a certain extent. The rules were rather loose as this was just a culture festival cook-off.

The judging would be performed by ten judges, each capable of giving up to ten points, for a total of 100. Something that tasted normal was five points, something delicious was seven and something bad was three. With that as the basic mindset, the judges were free to add or remove three points at their own discretion. For example, something normal tasting was five points, but with a very nice looking dish, it was worth seven points. This was also a very free way to grade the dishes.

Once every dish was finished with the judging, or time was up, the cook-off would end. This was the one strict rule of the otherwise rather free cook-off. With the post-festival celebrations waiting, there would be no extensions.

Once judging was over, the top six scorers would be brought up on the stage and commended. On top of that, the top three would get trophies. The

school was now full of discussion over who would become the glorious first champion.

The president politely explained how the event would play out. Several questions were brought up on the way, but fortunately, there was no major confusion and the meeting ended without a hitch. When it ended, the time was past 3PM. With time to spare, Koutarou and Kenji headed out towards the station.

“By the way, Kou, do you have some business around the station?”

”The situation is looking suspect, so I was thinking of getting some insurance”

”Insurance?”

”Ah, here it is”

Koutarou took Kenji with him to the biggest drugstore in the city. There was something he wanted to buy there.

“Did you hurt yourself or something?”

The first thing that popped into Kenji's mind was that Koutarou had hurt himself somewhere. Being as active as he was, Koutarou would get hurt every now and then. So salves and bandages were indispensable.

“No”

”Then are you sick... I guess that would never happen”

Koutarou had never been truly sick. At worst he had caught a cold or two.

“Of course not”

“Then what are you buying? Just general goods?”

”Nope, this”

Koutarou brought Kenji with him to the medicine shelves. More specifically, the corner centered around remedies.

“Are you sure you're really not sick?”

“I'll be getting sick after the cook-off”

”Huh?”

Not understanding what Koutarou meant, his eyes widened behind his glasses. Koutarou pulled off a box from the shelf and presented it to Kenji.

“We will without a doubt get sick after the contest. That's why this will be needed”

”Stomach medicine... w-wait a second, what do you mean!?”

Kenji received the box and read the label. Koutarou had given him one of the most expensive stomach medicines.

“You know that Theia and the others are participating, right?”

”Yeah... they're participating because of Kasagi-san”

”But only about half of them can actually cook”

“What about the other half?”

“They're time bombs. Those bombs will probably go off on November 3”

”Whaaat!?”

Kenji was finally able to understand the situation. Koutarou had come here to buy stomach medicine in preparation for the bombs. He felt it was so dangerous he didn't even hesitate to go with the expensive brand.

“Wait, wait, are you sure!?”

”Yeah, that's kinda how it looked. So Mackenzie, make sure you're in good shape for the day”

”Kou, you...”

Kenji was surprised. However, his surprise wasn't because of the girls making something dangerous. Instead, it was because this indirectly pointed to a certain fact.

“Hey, Kou, you realized you just said an explosive statement right?”

“Explosive? Yeah, I guess I did”

Koutarou nodded. He had indeed said that half of the girls cooking were like time bombs.

“That's not what I meant. Your explosive statement is about your relationship with women”

”I didn't say anything about that”

”No, you did. You're fully aware of how good those girls are at cooking. If you weren't, you couldn't make that kind of statement”

“Well, I guess. I've been with them more than a year and a half after all”

”Idiot. If you can judge their skills, it means you’re eating their homemade food daily, or associated with them long enough to get a grasp of their skills”

“That's an explosive statement?”

“Of course it is. Not even I know the true cooking skills of the girls I've been with”

This was something only Kenji could understand from his experience of dating several different girls.

In this day and age it was difficult to understand the true cooking skills of a girl you were going out with. There were dishes that you only needed to throw on a pan, and tools were included when making sweets. Moreover, Kenji had even experienced one of the girls buying cookies from the supermarket, putting them in the oven and burning them a little, only to have her go 'I made these myself, but I messed up a little!'.

In other words, cooking skills weren't something you'd get a grasp of from dating a little. And when it came to someone with a terrible personality, they would use anything they could to make themselves look better.

“Yet you properly understand their abilities. In other words, you pretty much just said that you're going out with all of them”

”Of course not, I'm not like you. You can understand that just by associating with them as friends”

Koutarou didn't struggle. If they were talking about someone he had just met and started dating, Kenji might be correct, but Koutarou and the girls of room 106 weren't like that. They had been on bad terms at first, so they knew of each others' good and bad sides. Because their relationship had changed gradually over a long period of time, Kenji's reasoning wouldn't apply.

“Besides, Mackenzie, you know how good at cooking I am, right? It's just like that”

“... Well, I guess”

Kenji smiled wryly and nodded, but he was thinking something different.

The moat around his heart is starting to get filled up...

If the girls around Koutarou had taken the same path as Kenji, then another nine Kenjis would appear. And the girls would move to prove that they would never disappear. Just like Kenji had.

But Kou. Even if their entrance and process are the same as mine, it doesn't mean the exit will be the same. You probably don't get it...

However, there was one fundamental difference between Kenji and the girls, which was their method of proving they would never disappear would be more like that of a girl's. And as a result, Koutarou's relationship with the girls would become special. While protecting their mask of being just friends, they would get closer than anyone else.

"What are you laughing at?"

"It's nothing. So, Kou, you're buying that?"

"Of course. That's why I came"

"You're fine with one?"

"Let's get enough for all of the judges"

"Then another box it is"

Kenji chose not to say it out loud. That way would be more fun, and it was his small revenge for being called a lady killer.

Part 15

November 3 was fortunately blessed with good weather from the morning. There was also no worrisome cold, the sun was bright, the sky was blue, by afternoon the temperature had steadily increased.

“Now then everyone, it's what you've all been waiting for. It's time for the Kitsushouharukaze high school's cook-off!”

The former president of the cooking society's voice echoed through the venue as the event MC. Koutarou was sitting at the far end of the judges seats, listening to the voice coming out from the speakers.

“The cook-off is a simple contest between those from, and outside of, our school who are confident in their cooking skills”

The former president was standing on the same stage as Koutarou and the others holding a microphone, explaining the outline of the contest to the people gathered in the gym. Her smooth talking was the result of a lot of training.

“There are only two important points! Does it look good, and is it actually good! Will there be a dish that can make the stomachs of our ten judges growl? Or will they end up growling in disappointment instead! The ones with the answer to that are our 24 contestants waiting for the start signal in the home economics classroom!”

The big monitor behind the president displayed the situation in the home economics classroom. It was the relay system the Kitsushouharukaze broadcasting club and the shopping district's youth association had worked together to create.

The monitor was currently displaying the contestants. A total of 24. The majority of them were students from the school, but some of them were outsiders. There were people from the restaurants in the shopping district or simply people who loved cooking. By the way, Clan was one of those outsider participants.

“The contestants will be required to use the ingredients produced in this town that we have provided, and some ingredients they've brought in themselves, to create a dish and have it judged within three hours time. In the case that they don't make it in time, they will be failed, so adding in the time required to judge, they will have to create their dish in roughly two hours! Handling this time limit will be one of the important points for this cook-off”

After the camera filming the home economics classroom slowly panned across the room to show all of the participants, it stopped in one of the corners of the room. The ingredients for the cook-off were piled up there. These ingredients came from the cooperation of the shopping district, so on the bottom of the monitor was a note saying 'In cooperation with – Kitsushouharukaze shopping district'.

“Then let's move on to introducing the participants! First off is the pride of the cooking society, the new president—”

Once the ingredients were shown and the overall presentation was finished, they moved onto to introducing the individual participants. This would introduce the 24 participants, but out of those 24, nine of them were related to Koutarou. And before too many had been introduced, a familiar face filled up the monitor.

“Entry number 4, our society's strong arm, Kasagi Shizuka-chan!”

”Could you stop that, senpai!”

”Despite having a black belt in karate, she strives to perfect cooking as well. A rare girl striving for perfection in both literary and martial arts. In this contest, we're secretly hoping she'll split a pumpkin with her bare hands”

”I won't split one!”

The first to appear on screen was Shizuka. While it was hard to say it was an introduction, their back and forth let Koutarou know how Shizuka stood with the rest of the cooking society. He believed they probably had a lot of fun during club activities.

“Let's move on to the next contestant before the camera is split in half too!”

”Maybe I really should split it...”

Replacing the mumbling Shizuka, a girl with long black hair appeared on screen. It was Kiriha's turn now.

“Entry number 5, Kurano Kiriha-san!”

”I'm Kurano. Thank you for having me here today”

”Kurano-san is good friends with Shizuka-chan from before, and ended up participating at Shizuka-chan's request. But you can't underestimate her! According to Shizuka-chan's information, Kurano-san performs all housework perfectly, and is the perfect wife material. Of course, her cooking skills are terrifying”

”My... if you flatter me that much I'll blush”

“With this modest and graceful personality, even I'd like to marry her! I imagine even more will feel the same depending on the outcome of this contest!”

Kiriha continued hiding her true self at school. Up until now, not a single one had seen through her. Even now, she didn't let down her guard and allow for her act to slip up for even a moment.

“Moving on is entry number 6! Sakuraba Harumi-san!”

”U-Uhm, I'm Sakuraba Harumi. I'll do my best today!”

Unlike Kiriha, Harumi was full of openings. Having suddenly been called out as she was happily watching Kiriha, her voice trembled. She had less resistance to appearing in front of people, but even then, she was unused to interviews. As a result, she gave off the atmosphere of a normal girl.

“Sakuraba-san appeared as the main heroine of the plays the drama club put on last year, and as a result started attracting attention. Even now she is rising in popularity as the girl everyone wants to protect. It appears that a lot of fans have gathered in the venue. Sakuraba-san, please say something to everyone at the venue”

”Uhm... I might be nervous, but I will do my utmost. Everyone, please cheer for me”

At the end she was somewhat able to recover, as she smiled with her usual calm smile and bowed deeply. As she did, a stir began running in the gym. It seemed that there really were fans there.

“Thank you very much, Sakuraba-san. Next up is entry number 7. Higashihongan Sanae-san!”

”Today, this Higashihongan Sanae will seize victory!”

Completely opposite of Harumi, Sanae boldly made her victory declaration. That said, only half of her was being bold. From what Koutarou could tell, it was Sanae-chan speaking, with Sanae-san keeping back. Being introverted, Sanae-san would leave this part to Sanae-chan.

“That was Higashihongan-san with a powerful comment, but she comes from a family that run a shrine with a long history and tradition and she's received rigorous training to become a wife since childhood. Her comment just now is definitely not just hot air. She might be this contest's dark horse!”

”I'm the favorite, the favorite! Everyone, place your bets on me!”

”Ahahaha, don't actually place any bets! We from the cooking society strive to run a clean and right contest”

“Anyways, I will win win!”

“Thank you very much. That was the very confident Higashihongan Sanae-san”

Sanae acted the same as always, and didn't seem all that nervous.

Sanae might unexpectedly actually win this...

Normally, one would have a hard time performing at their usual peak due to the pressure of a large contest. However, Sanae in her natural state was unaffected by that, so she might actually win.

“... Hey, Kou”

That was when Kenji, who was sitting next to Koutarou, poked at him at whispered so only he could hear.

“What?”

”It doesn't seem as dangerous as you said it was”

It looked to Kenji like Shizuka, Kiriha and Harumi all knew how to cook. He also felt like he had seen them bring homemade lunches with them. The only unknown element was Sanae, but she had good intuition, so he couldn't imagine her making anything too dangerous.

“The problem starts from here on”

Koutarou smiled wryly as the next person appeared on the monitor.

“Next we have students from overseas! Since they’re childhood friends we'll introduce them together! They are Theiamillis-san and Ruthkania-san!”

The ones that appeared on the monitor were Theia and Ruth. Since she'd end up explaining it twice otherwise, the former president decided to introduce them together.

“I'm Theiamillis. Feel free to call me Theia”

“My name is Ruth. I thank you for having me and Theia-sama here”

”The two of them transferred to this school together last year. The two are very excellent, Theiamillis-san especially so at sports, and Ruthkania-san especially so at mathematics. With this event being centered around cooking, we hope to catch a glimpse of another side of them”

Theia stood proud and bold, while Ruth held back in a more modest fashion. The leading part this time around was Theia, everyone was able to sense that from the way the two were standing.

“Are those two dangerous?”

“Theia is the dangerous one. She's grown up as a very pampered rich girl, so eating is her specialty”

”Ahh, Theia-san does look like she'd hate detailed work”

Kenji had also noticed Theia's rough edge. It was something one would notice after being in the same class for a year and a half. Her handwriting was dynamic and very manly. Moreover, when cleaning, her broom handling is rather rough. So it was hard to believe that Theia would be good at cooking when it required a more delicate touch.

“Right? Her cooking is dangerous, I guarantee it. Be prepared”

”I see”

“The next one is even more dangerous”

Having understood what Koutarou meant, Kenji nodded as Koutarou pointed to the monitor. While the two had been talking, the person on display had changed.

“The next contestant is this person! When mentioning the cosplay society, you think of this person, everyone's beloved Nijino Yurika-san!”

“I'm Nijino Yurika. Uhm, uhm, I will do my best to create something delicious”

“I'm sure an explanation is unnecessary for this person. Now, everyone, please cheer for Yurika-chan!”

As she would be forced to participate and suffer at every school event, Yurika was already a school celebrity. And contrasting to Yurika's intentions, her misfortune made her popular.

“Nijino-san is participating too!?”

The moment Kenji saw Yurika's face his expression cramped up. He had convinced himself that Yurika definitely wouldn't participate because he knew just how clumsy she was.

“That's right. And as judges, we have to eat her cooking”

“Impossible!?”

”... So you've finally understood our reality, Mackenzie”

“Kou, give me some of that medicine too!”

”You should have just said so from the start”

Koutarou passed Kenji three tablets of the medicine under the table so that the audience couldn't see. Kenji tried to take them right away but Koutarou stopped him.

“Stop, they're meant to be drunk after eating”

”Okay, thank you. I'm grateful for your consideration”

”As long as you understand”

Kenji placed the medicine he received in a tissue and carefully put it away in his pocket. Those three tablets were his only life lines now.

“We also have another contender from the cosclub, and her name is Aika Maki! She is an old friend of Yurika's, and when cosplaying she will often serve as the villain. This time around she will technically be Yurika's rival again, so let's hear what she has to say!”

“Uhm, I'm not good at cooking as everyone else, but I have set my own goal and I will do my best to achieve that”

”Good girl! What a good girl! Please don't forget this even when she's acting as a villain during cosplaying!”

The introduction of participants moved on to Maki after Yurika. After listening to her introduction, Kenji poked Koutarou once more.

“Kou, what about Aika-san?”

”Aika-san knows she's bad at cooking. That's why she probably won't do anything unreasonable”

”Which means, even if she does poorly, it'll just taste bad”

”I don't think we have to worry about Aika-san. Her chocolate wasn't that bad either”

“As long as it's edible”

Having learned that Yurika would participate, Kenji began feeling that he was in danger during this cook-off, and he started getting really sensitive regarding each of the participants.

Should I tell him or not...

Koutarou knew of one participant that might be even more dangerous than Yurika. Since this was something Kenji had no way of knowing, he was wondering if he should tell him or not.

“And now we move on to the non students! First up is Clariossa-san! She is a relative of Theiamillis-san, and decided to participate while she had come over to play!”

”Nice to meet you, my name is Clariossa. Today I would like to you show my version of going all out, so please keep your expectations high”

That person more dangerous than Yurika was none other than Clan. She couldn't do any housework whatsoever. From his experience with her in the past Forthorthe, Koutarou knew that better than anyone else. Unlike Theia, she was completely and fully bred as a princess.

That alone would have been fine, but ever since it was decided that Clan would participate in the cook-off, she had for some reason shut herself in her laboratory. She also wouldn't say what she was doing in there. From that, Koutarou started feeling a fear of Clan's cooking.

But, oh well, even if I tell him, there’s nothing he can do... so I guess I’ll just keep quiet

In the end, Koutarou didn't divulge his information on Clan. Right now he only had his intuition to go on and even if he told Kenji, it would only make

him worry more, but the situation wouldn't change at all. In that case, he might feel more at ease just thinking that Yurika was the only real danger.

Once the introduction of the 24 participants was done, they moved onto the introductions of the judges. Because Koutarou and Kenji were sitting in one of the corners, their introductions were left to the last. As Koutarou was free until it was his turn he let out a yawn as the introductions reached Kenji.

“Our ninth judge is Matsudaira Kenji-kun! The drama club's ace who will handle any handsome roles! The second generation Blue Knight-sama!”

“Mackenzie-kun!”

”Push shoulder to shoulder with Satomi-kun!”

”Okay, okay... come on Kou, smile, smile”

”Kyaa, it's kinda like that!”

As the MC presents Kenji, cheers came from audience in the gym. Since Kenji responded to those cheers, the gym started to become an uproar. This was influenced by the Blue Knight and the Silver Princess being performed with a new cast.

“... Talk about popularity”

In response to Kenji's popularity, Koutarou moved past surprise and straight into admiration. He was popular with the girls to begin with, but after showing off a flawless performance at the play, he secured many more fans.

But that’s a big help in a certain way

And this wasn't bad for Koutarou either. If Kenji's reputation improved, Koutarou as the Blue Knight would start to vanish from people's memories.

If possible, he didn't want to be known for acting as himself, so he welcomed this situation.

“You don't get it, Kou”

“Huh?”

”There's plenty of girls using me to get to you because you're hard to talk to”

”That's not true”

”The girls that like you are always like that, and they have always been like that too”

As Koutarou and Kenji lined up shoulder to shoulder, the girls would naturally call out to Kenji. However there was often those who went through Kenji because they didn't know how to talk to Koutarou. Kenji misunderstanding that and confessing to them only to get rejected was something that had happened more than once. That's why Kenji suspected some of the girls cheering at him were fans of Koutarou's.

“Nowadays that couldn't be true”

“We'll find out who's right very soon”

While Koutarou didn't agree, Kenji was confident. And they should find out when Koutarou was introduced.

“And finally, our tenth and final judge is this person! The legendary first generation Blue Knight who is still brought up as a topic every now and then, Satomi Koutarou-kun!”

The moment the former president introduced Koutarou, the gym that had been noisy up until now quieted down. Responding to the female students

shutting their mouths, everyone in the gym fell silent. They were most likely puzzled.

“See, I told you. I'm not like you, everyone's already forgotten about me”

”That's strange, that shouldn't—”

Just as Kenji was about to make a rebuttal, the gym that had fallen silent erupted.

“Kyaaaaaaa!!”

”Blue Knight-samaaaaa!!”

Koutarou wasn't as good looking or minded his manners as well as Kenji. But the girls in the venue still hadn't forgotten about the parting scene between the Silver Princess and the Blue Knight. The large-scale event helped to push the backs of the girls who usually only looked on from afar. Their cheers were indeed directed towards Koutarou. Even a year later, Koutarou's performance of the Blue Knight was still burned into their memories.

“... Give them a wave, Kou”

”Y-Yeah...”

Whilst puzzled, Koutarou waved his hands as Kenji directed him to. As he did, the gym heated up even more. The end results were precisely what Shizuka had hoped for, but Koutarou still couldn't believe it.

“I understand how you feel, but please calm down everyone! Today is a cook-off. The stars of this show are our 24 participants!”

Thanks to the efforts of the MC, the venue started to calm down, and as if waiting for that, the monitor lit up again and displayed the 24 participants

standing by their kitchen counter. All of the participants seemed nervous, and their expressions were serious. Seeing that, the people of the venue started raising their voices for the contest.

“Then I believe it's about time we begin! The glorious first annual Kitsushouharukaze high school cook-off! Start cooking!!”

Kenji's and Koutarou's popularity was certainly impressive, but the shouts and cheers as the contest were the largest yet.

Part 16

As the cook-off began, the multiple cameras set up in the home economics classroom captured the participants cooking. The former president and a cooking expert from the city explained as they cooked. They were keeping the crowd entertained until the cooking was complete.

“The ones standing out are as expected the three from the cooking society. Everything from how they wash their vegetables and handle a kitchen knife gives off a good feel”

”You've done it everyone, you're getting praise from Kashiwabara-sensei! Keep it up!”

The first ones displayed were the three members of the cooking society. Including Shizuka, they were two second years and one first year. Their ardent training every day paid off as the sight of them cooking gave the cooking expert a favorable impression of them.

“Kashiwabara-sensei, are there any other participants that catch your eye?”

“In a good sense, or a bad sense? Which would you like to hear first”

”Then let's start with the good”

”Entry number 5 and... 9 perhaps”

”Number 5 is Kurano-san and number 9 is Ruthkania-san”

“I believe these two are very used to cooking. Their movements are very functional and beautiful. In terms of students of the school, these two probably rival the cooking society”

”And what of those that aren't students?”

“I would say number 24, the master of the shopping district's 'Bird Stop'. He's very immature. If the head of that long-established chicken restaurant gets serious, there's no way students could beat him”

“I've heard he's here to display his new menu. And if he were to win, he'll pull some foul play to disqualify himself”

”If he's disqualified then ranking would move up after all. He sure is reliable...”

The big favorite was the owner of a chicken restaurant. Following him was the cooking society, and then Kiriha and Ruth. The cooking expert expected the rest to bunch up together.

“Then, how about the bad participants, Kashiwabara-sensei?”

”That would be number 10 by far. And also number 8”

”Number 10 is Yurika-chan, number 8 is Theiamillis-san. Yurika-chan was expected, but—”

“What is expected supposed to mean!?”

”What is so bad about Theiamillis-san?”

“Yes, well she is a complete beginner. It feels like she is struggling to do as she has been taught. Then there's her form when holding the knife. It looks less like cooking, and more like some kind of military arts”

“As you say, it certainly seems like the cabbage being cut up by Theiamillis-san would let out a scream”

“However, her overall dish might not be bad”

”It sounded from your tone that she would fail though”

”Well, she's chosen a good menu. She's picked dishes that even a beginner would have a hard time failing. With that strategic eye of hers, it might be enough for a competition of this level”

“In other words, she's aiming to win on a strategic level then. And as for Yurika-chan—”

”She is simply out of the question”

“Eeeeeeeeeeh!? Why would you say something like that!?”

”For starters, she's not focusing on her cooking”

”You're right. It seems like she's more interested in us talking”

“Ugh”

“On top of that, there's her extreme tension. Can you see her hands trembling?”

”They sure are shaking. It looks like she'd easily cut far past what she wants, just looking at her makes me nervous”

”I'm still doing my best here!!”

”So let's stop talking about her. I feel my life span shortening just by watching”

“I agree”

“Uhh, t-this is too cruel”

In the battle for last place, Yurika was currently in the lead by a wide margin. Just looking at her, Yurika gave off an aura that told others that 'yup, she'll probably place last'. When it came to skill, Theia was only just above Yurika, but her choice of menu helped cover her weakness. The expert's opinion was that on a whole, Theia probably wouldn't place last.

“Then are there any other participants that catch your eye?”

“Number 7 and 12”

“That's Higashihongan Sanae-san and Clariossa-san”

”Just what is going on with these two?”

“What do you mean?”

“For starters, that number 7 girl... what she's doing is absurd. The way she's holding her chopsticks is strange, and the way she's whisking makes it look like she's a child playing with water”

“Now that you mention it... calling it childish mischief does seem fitting”

”Yet despite that, her cooking is following the rudiments of cooking theory. How she mixes her ingredients, the order of seasoning, the temperature of the oven. I don't get her”

”It's certainly a mysterious spectacle”

What was causing confusion for the cooking expert and the MC was the two personalities of Sanae. Sanae-san was the one who led the way, though because of her introverted personality, she couldn't surface in a place like this where she'd gather so much attention. So instead, Sanae-chan was working under Sanae-san's instructions. That's why her actions didn't match her results, creating an odd sight. Everyone apart from Koutarou and the others of room 106 couldn't help but look on in confusion.

“Then how about number 12, Clariossa-san?”

“Her cooking isn't cooking at all. I don't want to say it, but that's on the level of magic or psychic powers”

”... Huh?”

”Just look at her. She seems to be about to peel the potatoes”

“Okay...”

And the one that confused the people at the venue even more than Sanae was Clan.

“She pulled out a pan. Will she be throw away the skin in that, or will she put the potatoes in there instead?”

“Neither”

”Eh? Wait, aahhh!? She put the potatoes in the pan like that—!!”

“She hasn't even cleaned them”

”Clariossa-san started shaking the pan seemingly without thinking!!”

“That'd be the correct method if she was making kofukiimo [3], but this is where it gets interesting”

”Clariossa-san removed the lid on her pan and is placing the potatoes on a cutting— wait, whaaat!? What is going on!!”

”That's right, for some reason, the skin has been peeled off, and the potatoes have been cut into cubes”

“What an unbelievable sight! I can't think of this as cooking! It must be some trick, or magic... anyways, it's something different from cooking! What an unexpected development!!”

Only a few on the venue could correctly understand the eccentric behavior Clan was repeating. Koutarou was one of those few.

That idiot! So that’s what she was making!!

He understood it was one of Clan's inventions right away. Though he couldn't even imagine how it worked, he was certain it made use of some advanced science. It might have looked like a pan, but it was actually something completely different.

“It seems like she intends to only cook using that pan”

“What can I say... I want that pan”

”Agreed. If this is a sales demonstration, it's a big success”

It looked like the cook-off was in for a wild ride. For better or for worse, nobody could look away. The excitement of the spectators watching over the cooking was growing non stop.

Part 17

Surprisingly, the first one to finish her dish and receive judging was Theia. While her handling might have been unsteady, her menu was simple and optimized in regards to time. Theia placed her finished dish on trays and put them down before the judges. Due to the seat order, the last tray was placed in front of Koutarou.

“Oh, a cold shabu-shabu with a potato potage, there's something in the rice too. What is it?”

”It's chicken and root vegetables. The seasoning is very European you see”

“Hmm, you've put some thought into this”

”I'm aware of my own limits. Out of the strategies I could perform, these are the top three. Besides, the first meal is the most delicious”

Koutarou listened to a very Theia-esque explanation as he carried the food to his mouth. Theia silently stared at him as he did. Her uneasy appearance made her look like a child giving away a birthday present for the first time.

“How is it? Delicious?”

“Yeah... wait, I can't answer that!”

”R-Right. Sorry”

Theia wanted to know what Koutarou thought and instinctively asked him, but this was a cook-off. The judges couldn't reveal their scores yet.

“I'll start by eating, so just wait like a good girl”

”O-Okay. I'll just do that. Phew...”

Though she hadn't gotten an answer, Theia felt some relief. When she thought about it, Koutarou's expression when he took a bite wasn't that bad. At the very least, it wasn't too bad, so she could breathe out.

Part 18

The next contender was Maki. Her simple menu made her finish up fast, but she hadn't practiced as much as Theia had, so she ended up coming out second.

“Oh, so Aika-san's made hot dogs and fries. That's right, this is what I want to eat”

”I've tried matching the seasoning to you too, Satomi-kun”

In Maki's case, her primary goal was to match her dish to Koutarou's tastes as much as possible. For that sake, she had spent a lot of time researching his tastes, leaving her less time to practice on cooking. As a result, she ended up finishing after Theia, despite having the simplest menu of the participants.

“It's totally foul play though”

”It's fine isn't it. It's not like all ten judges are going to praise me anyways, so I at least wanted one of the judges to give me ten points”

Not only were the ingredients for Maki's hot dogs picked to match Koutarou's tastes, but so was the cooking method and seasoning, and the dish was fully made to match him. The surface was crusty, with an extra helping of salt and pepper. The cabbage stuffed into the bread alongside the hot dog was not raw, but stir-fried, and it had a smell of butter. The fries had been lightly sprinkled with curry powder and had a spicy taste. The taste overall was thick, so apart from Koutarou, the overall appraisal shouldn't be that high. It was only fair as the dish was made with just Koutarou in mind.

“How many points I give you is a secret”

“Yeah. But I believe you'll give me a good score”

Maki's innocent smile tugged at Koutarou's heart. Almost to the point where he'd instinctively give her ten points. However, some sadness accompanied her innocence. Though Koutarou had to disregard all of that when he graded her, it was a truly troublesome dish.

Part 19

The third contender was Ruth. From now on the dishes started getting more complicated. Her dish consisted of omelette with rice and a vegetable soup. As Koutarou saw the food being carried in, his eyes sparkled.

“Alright, it's omelette with rice!”

”Please calm down, Ma—, uhm, Satomi-sama. The food won't run away”

Ruth said as she poked a flag through the omelette with rice she just put down.

“So it's your cooking, Ruth-san. It looks great

“My my, ufufufu”

”Then let's start right away!”

”Yes, please eat up”

The omelette with rice already looked delicious, and it was made by Ruth. Even the flag was fluttering. So Koutarou began eating the omelette with rice at the same pace he usually did.

”Yeah, this is good”

”Satomi-sama, you can't divulge your evaluation now”

”Right”

Using tomato puree and chicken, Ruth had made chicken pilaf, which she lightly stir-fried to adjust the taste, she then wrapped it with a buttered up soft-boiled egg. Carefully made demi-glace sauce had been poured on top of the dish. It was a so-called luxurious omelette with rice.

The stock of the vegetable soup had been made using the bones of a chicken, creating a consommé. The ingredients put into it were things like onion and celery, things with a refreshing taste. As the omelette with rice was thick, the soup was made light to balance it out.

No matter how you looked at it, there was no way it was bad. However, considering his position, Koutarou couldn't give out a detailed impression right now. There were still more dishes to be judged.

“If you don't stop there, you won't have enough room to eat the other dishes”

“I see. What a shame”

Koutarou saying it was a shame was practically the same as giving his opinion on the dish. So Ruth looked happily at Koutarou who had begun writing on the examination note.

Part 20

Shizuka appeared after two more dishes after Ruth's had been judged. She had brought with her a pork cutlet set meal. Her cooking was faithful to the basics, and she'd made a meat dish to appeal to the male judges. It was clear that it tasted delicious just from the mere sight of the beautifully presented dish. The ability of the cooking society's ace was being demonstrated.

“If you put sesame seeds on top of the sauce like this, the aftertaste will change a little. It will become somewhat more fragrant”

“A detailed twist isn't it”

“We're the cooking society because we research these kinds of things”

”You have a point”

As a finishing touch, Shizuka grinded up sesame seeds before the judges and sprinkled it over the pork cutlet's sauce. With that, Shizuka's cooking not only changed the taste, but also served as entertainment.

“We'll have no choice but to give this a high score”

”Thank you. However, personally, my score won't be decided by this”

”What do you mean”

”I'm talking about Yurika-chan. My challenge this time around is just how close Yurika-chan's cooking will get to this”

If she only wanted to win the contest, Shizuka probably would have chosen another dish. However, as it would also serve as guidance for Yurika, she chose this. Her goal this time around was to get Yurika to overcome the biggest obstacle when it came to deep-fried food.

“I've done my best to beat the recipe for pork cutlets into Yurika-chan's head for this past month. So keep your expectations high”

Shizuka said as she smiled. Her smile was overflowing with her wish for Yurika to put up a good fight.

“You're taking care of others as always, landlord-san”

”Maybe that's just in my nature. Also... I'm currently in my best weight, so I have more confidence”

Shizuka whispered the latter half so that others couldn't hear.

“Won't your own happiness get neglected if you're so focused on others?”

“It's fine. You've noticed after all, Satomi-kun”

Like Koutarou said, Shizuka was aware that she was putting herself behind. However, if she didn't do that, her own feelings wouldn't calm down, so up until now she had given up, accepting it as inevitable. But now she believed that this was the correct thing to do. Because she had met someone who noticed that part of her.

“You'll give me some kind words later, right?”

“No I won't”

”Then sit down and hug my knees as I face the wall”

”Okay, okay!”

Shizuka believed that she could become happy the way she was now.

Out of the girls of room 106, Harumi was fifth to appear. She was neither too fast nor too slow, it was a fitting timing for someone like her who was neither prudent nor self/asserted, and Koutarou couldn't keep himself from laughing.

“Why are you laughing?”

“I was just thinking that you're like an honors student even at times like these”

“What is that supposed to mean”

However, when it came to dealing with someone like Koutarou who she had known for a long time, she had learned to become more self-asserting, and she puffed up her cheeks in dissatisfaction. It was only at times like this that her honors student impression weakened.

“That's just probably who you are”

”Geez, Satomi-kun, you're really mean from time to time”

“That's probably just who I am”

”Satomi-kun!!”

Despite Harumi being angry, she seemed somewhat gentle and adorable. The goodness from within her poured out and weakened her self-assertion. In fact, despite complaining to Koutarou, she was politely handing out her dish. And the salisbury steak placed down in front of Koutarou was about as swollen as Harumi's cheeks. It was her masterpiece filled with cheese.

“It looks very delicious”

”Really?”

And the moment Koutarou spoke just one word of praise, Harumi's expression turned into a smile. Not only was she bad at attacking others, but she was also bad at maintaining her anger.

“... Whoops”

Noticing that she was smiling, Harumi forced an angry expression. However, as she already smile, her expression had no effect at all.

“... Uhm, I don't think you have to force yourself to be angry”

”Alaia-san is saying that 'it's a matter of pride!'”

“Oh? … Then how about this”

Struggling to respond, Koutarou fought back with a funny face. It was a simple gesture consisting of pushing up his cheeks with his hands and changing the shape of his eyes and mouth.

“Puh”

As he did, Harumi almost burst out laughing in an instant. Her angry expression vanished immediately. Harumi's tolerance towards laughter was low as well. Even more so when with someone she completely trusted.

“That's more like it”

“... Geez, Satomi-kun...”

”Since you're so cute, that's an extra three plus points”

”Be more serious, Satomi-kun”

Harumi raised a fist that didn't look like it could harm a fly and scolded Koutarou. It was starting to get hard to keep track of what kind of evaluation this was, but this was fun in its own way, and in the end, Harumi left satisfied.

Part 21

The next one to show up was Kiriha, but Sanae was next to her. However, that Sanae was just Sanae-chan, as she had left Sanae-san back in the home economics classroom.

“How does it look?”

“We're already half ways done”

”Hmm. Then it's about time. I should bring my dish out too”

”Hurry up”

”Oka~y”

Sanae left just as quickly as she came. She had come to survey how the judging was going. That was because her dish would taste better in the

latter half of the competition. Unaware of that, Koutarou asked Kiriha, who was setting the table in front of him.

“What did she make?”

“Well, you'll just have to wait and see”

”I guess so”

”For now, only look at me”

“Don't make it sound so weird”

”No, I meant it exactly the way it sounded”

“Hey...”

”Fufufu...”

Kiriha smiled as she put down a bowl of rice in front of Koutarou. With that, all the dishes were set. Kiriha had prepared very common dishes. There was nikujaga, deep-fried tofu, boiled greens with a dressing spinach and finally rice and miso soup. There was nothing special to it, they were standard meals you could find in any home.

“This is awfully plain for you”

”Do I look like that flashy of a woman to you?”

Kiriha reached out and gently pinched the back of Koutarou's hand. It was an action telling him that she was a little upset.

“Since you're hiding your true self at school, I figured you'd come out like that”

”So how do I look in terms of the normal me?”

“It's very much like you”

“Just hearing that is enough. Now, please eat”

Kiriha smiled and urged Koutarou to start the judging. Having him eat the food while it was still warm was standard practice.

“Woah, what is this... wait a second, what about the rest...?”

Koutarou began by drinking the miso soup, but he seemed to notice something there and moved to try the other dishes as well. As he did, he understood that it wasn't just the miso soup.

“This is amazing, I don't know what to say... other than homemade food that must have taken a lot of trouble to make”

“Can you tell?”

”I can't tell any of the detailed points, only the parts that stand out. I see... so this is the challenge you took on, Kiriha-san?”

”That's right”

There was nothing special about Kiriha's homemade cooking. The ingredients and the cooking utensils were all the same as one would use at home. The problem in question was the time. It had clearly been made using more time than one could imagine spending on homemade food. You could call it super-high quality normal food.

Even the miso soup was at that high quality. The stock was very carefully made, and just taking a sip of it spread the fragrance of bonito fish through

your entire mouth. Though the seasoning was the usual miso, it wasn't the taste of the typical commercial miso. Instead, several miso had been purchased in an attempt to find the ideal mix. As a result, the taste didn't clash with the stock, but harmonized instead. The ingredients consisted of seaweed and radish, but the radish had been prepared in such a way that it would go down smooth. It was so overwhelmingly high quality one couldn't help but wonder if homemade food really needed to go this far.

“It's amazingly normal— I didn't think I'd ever use these words as praise”

“Then I've done it”

Koutarou couldn't help but obediently praise Kiriha's cooking. It was extremely normal homemade food, that nobody would get tired of eating every day. This was a form of cooking that only Kiriha could pull off.

“But why did you do something like this?”

“I want to spend a life like this. I want to desperately live out a natural life”

“... I can kind of understand that”

”It's also to serve as a handicap towards Theia-dono and the others”

”I see. So it was a good chance to aim for your ideal”

“That's right”

She didn't want anything special, just a normal everyday. She'd do her best to maintain such a lifestyle as that was her ideal life, which had splendidly been recreated on the tray. And since Koutarou had shown his understanding, Kiriha happily smiled.

Part 22

Sanae showed up a little while after Kiriha had left. The judging was already in its latter half, and there was less than an hour remaining of the cook-off. Sanae believed this timing was the best for the judges to try her dish.

“Now, eat up Koutarou! You may eat your fill and praise me like crazy!”

“Hmm... so you made sweets, Sanae”

”Ehehehe, I figured there'd be less competition with sweets and it's around this time you'd like some!”

Sanae had made sweets, and it had been made with an after-meal dessert in mind. A dessert that showed up by the time the judges starting getting sick of food. With that, the change in taste would remain in the judges minds, and she'd have fewer rivals as well. It was Sanae's great plan to seize a top spot with her abilities.

“Surprisingly it's a plan you've used your head for”

”It's time for you to learn of Sanae-chan's true power!”

“Thank you for the food”

”Eat until you're full!! And praise me until you get sick of it!! And while you're at it, increase my allowance!!”

As Sanae excitedly stared at him, Koutarou picked up some of the sweets piled up on the plate and carried them to his mouth. In total there were five different types of sweets. Cream puff, eclair, chocolate mousse, raspberry tart and honey doughnut. They were all on the small size, made so that they could be eaten with ease. They were all things Sanae personally wanted to eat.

“Oh, this is surprisingly properly done”

”Damn straight!”

”This must've been a lot of work”

”No, she knows how to make all of them”

”Oh yeah, I heard you underwent training to become a wife”

“Was it good?”

”I'm not allowed to say yet”

”Hmm”

Sanae swiftly astral projected and clung onto Koutarou's back. If he wasn't allowed to say, she would just ask the voice of his heart directly. Sanae's foul play used very advanced techniques.

”Was it good?”

”Yeah, you did good”

”Ehehehe~, so which one did you like?”

”The éclair I guess. I liked the change in taste more than the cream puff”

”Me too! The way it’s covered in chocolate is great, isn’t it!”

Koutarou's heart couldn't fully hide his intentions. So with no other choice available, he gave up on persuading Sanae and let her amuse herself with their conversation.

Part 23

Having trained under Shizuka's instructions, Yurika made the same dish as her. However, she brought her dish in an hour after Shizuka. Most likely because of her poor workmanship.

“So you've finally come, Yurika”

“Sorry to keep you waiting”

With less than half an hour of the cook-off left, there were many running in to get their dishes judged, and Yurika was one of them.

“Ooh, it looks normal at least”

To Koutarou's surprise, Yurika's pork cutlets looked like pork cutlets. While the cut was thicker than Shizuka's, it still looked okay, and it hadn't blackened from being fried too long either.

“Ehe, ehehehe, I made extra and picked out the ones that turned out good”

Currently, Yurika's success rate for pork cutlet was around 60%. So her plan was to make 50% more cutlets than there were judges.

She understood her own capabilities after having practiced together with Shizuka.

Now that I think about it, she can pull through when she gets serious. So I guess she got serious about cooking...

When it came to fighting, and studying, Yurika would carry through without fail when she truly had to. Yurika probably demonstrated that side of her this time as well.

“I'm sorry, Yurika”

“Eh? Why?”

“No, it's nothing. Let's hurry up and eat”

“Yes. Hurry before it cools”

Koutarou rearranged his feelings, before reaching out towards the pork cutlet with his chopsticks. It seems like it had just been brought up from the frier as steam was rising from the cuts. Heat had properly passed through the meat and there were no red parts. The smell also helped bring up an appetite. The overall atmosphere was not bad at all.

“Thank you for the food”

”Yes, you're welcome”

Koutarou put the pork cutlet in his mouth and felt the crispy texture of the outer layer. Next he felt a thick taste as the batter and sauce mixed, and finally the soft pork that still had its juices inside of it. It was without a doubt the taste of pork cutlets.

“How is it?”

“Rejoice, Yurika. It's a proper pork cutlet”

”Alright!! Is it good!?”

Being told that her dish was properly made, Yurika's eyes sparkled and she slammed her hands down on Koutarou's table and leaned forward.

“If I tell you that, it wouldn't be an examination”

“Ah, r-right! I'm sorry...”

When Koutarou stopped her, Yurika fell silent and withdrew. But seeing Yurika look so apologetic, Koutarou felt bad for her and followed up a little.

“But Yurika”

“Y-Yes?”

”If you had made this back when you lost that game... I wouldn't have had any complaints”

Yurika's pork cutlet was no match for Shizuka's. The thickness of the outer layer was not uniform, and it also looked like it had been frying for too long. However, it was a proper pork cutlet, and most of all, Koutarou believe it was better than what he himself could do.

“Ah...”

Hearing that, Yurika's face brightened up with a flash and she smiled as she firmly pressed her hands against her chest. Tears started forming in the corner of her eyes.

“Thank you very much! Thank you very much! It was worth all of the effort!”

Yurika wiped away her tears as she thanked Koutarou. She was truly happy. She felt like her feminine part had been acknowledged.

“... Is it really something to cry about?”

“You wouldn't get it, Satomi-san... boys don't...”

The placing does not mattered to Yurika. Just having Koutarou acknowledge her was enough. She had been able to achieve the goal she had been striving for this past month.

Part 24

Yurika repeatedly waved her hand as she left. Seeing her off, Koutarou felt something warm spreading throughout his chest. It was very pleasant seeing someone's efforts bear fruit.

I was thinking too negatively about Yurika...

As a result, Koutarou's expectations had proven wrong. There was no need to buy stomach medicine in preparation for Yurika's cooking. That just showed that Koutarou was still making light of Yurika. However, she was no longer the same as she was. Koutarou felt it was strange that he felt that way about Yurika. In the past he had only thought of her as a useless freeloader.

Or maybe I just wanted her to be remain a problematic classmate...

Koutarou dimly stared at the clock in the gym as he thought of that. The cook-off was almost over, only ten minutes remained.

“Ohohohoho... it's finally time for the star!!”

That was when the final participant, Clan, appeared for judging with a loud laugh. And as Clan appeared, the peaceful feeling Koutarou felt vanished somewhere.

“Geez, you were still left, weren't you”

”That's how you greet me? Now that I'm here, the victory is mine”

“You were making that food using some strange techniques, but is it actually edible?”

Koutarou sent Clan a doubtful glance. She had used a very novel method consisting of only putting her ingredients into a pan and shaking it. The pan in question was without a doubt made using some kind of advanced technology, but it still remained to be seen if it was actually harmful to one's health.

“Of course! It's the duty of a scientist to examine her inventions to make sure they're practical!”

”You sure about that?”

”I've tried it myself several times! It's made safe food!”

”Then that's fine”

”Just shut up and eat, Bertorion!!”

Clan practically slammed a deep plate down in front of Koutarou. Inside was the dish Clan had made. Brown and white, it was a dish with a unique contrast.

“... Curry?”

”That's right! It's the most delicious curry in the world!”

Clan was full of confidence. With her arms crossed she threw her head back. But it certainly didn't look like it to Koutarou.

“No matter how I look at it, it's just a made-at-home curry”

Clan had announced that it was the most delicious curry in the world, but it looked far from what you'd see at a luxurious restaurant and more like something you'd eat at home or school. It was a simply curry filled with potatoes and curry.

“Less chat and more eating!”

”Okay, okay, don't shout”

Clan probably wouldn't be satisfied until he tried it for himself, so Koutarou picked up the spoon and scooped up a mouthful of curry and rice.

“Now eat up, Bertorion! And grovel before me!”

“You don't have to exaggerate that much... Mmmmm!?”

However, when Koutarou put the curry in his mouth, he realized that Clan's words were neither a lie nor an exaggeration. It looked like a plain

curry, but the taste was something completely different. It confused him as the difference in taste and look was just so large.

“Clan, what is with this curry!?”

”Ohohohoho! This is the dawn of a new era of cooking! The time when all cooks grovel down before science has come!!”

”What did you do!?”

”It's simple, the nanomachines sprinkled onto the curry absorbed the taste, and completely blocked out the usual taste. It then sends the brain the false information that it's eating the most delicious curry in the world!”

Clan's two inventions worked together. The first invention, her pan, created a simple curry using nanomachines. And her second invention forcibly reedited the taste. The nanomachines sprinkled onto the curry as seasoning stepped in between the tongue and curry, and changed the taste.

“That's cheating!”

”No! This is a form of cooking that makes 0 use of the ingredients' taste!”

In other words, the curry was only made to create the proper texture, while the taste was completely fake. By just changing the taste, Clan made it easy to create the ultimate curry. Even a veteran cook would have no chance against this taste. It was only natural for Clan to boast triumphantly.

“Besides, there's no rule that forbids the use of—”

Bang.

However, that was when something unexpected happened.

“Woaaaah, w-w-what happened, Kou!!”

“—Hueh?”

Having eaten the curry, Koutarou literally spewed fire from his mouth and collapsed on the floor.

Part 25

Koutarou hadn't exploded and spewed fire because of one of Clan's misses. If anything, it was an accident caused by several factors working together.

There were nanomachines inside of Koutarou that had been injected before for medical treatment. Ruth had injected these into him for Koutarou's sake after fierce battles. These nanomachines not only healed his wounds and managed his health, but also worked to prevent invasions of foreign bodies. As a result, viruses and germs that entered his body were eliminated.

However, this time around that function had backfired. The seasoning nanomachines stuck on Koutarou's tongue feeding false information into his mind were deemed as foreign bodies and attacked in order to be eliminated. The nanomachines faithful to their duty began a counterattack the moment they were attacked. As a result, a war on a nanoscale broke out in Koutarou's mouth. The outcome of which was the explosion.

When Koutarou came to, Clan and Ruth explained what had happened to him. The nanomachines had clashed in an unexpected way, and no one in particular was to blame.

“... And that's what happened”

“I am sorry. I completely left out the possibility of you already having nanomachines inside of you”

”I also forgot to tell you”

“Hai shee, sho thathsh whath happhenhed hin mhy mhouth”

While it was on a small scale, an explosion had occurred in Koutarou's mouth, so it had gotten burnt. Which meant that he could barely speak. He was currently being treated by the medical nanomachines and magic.

“Sanae, please translate”

”Aye aye. He said 'I see, so that's what happened in my mouth'”

Fortunately, as long as he shouldered Sanae, he could get his point across. Since Sanae riding his back was a daily occurrence, he didn't feel any discomfort.

“Koutarou is saying 'What happened to the cook-off'”

While Koutarou was unconscious he had been taken to room 106. Because of that, he didn't know the results of the cook-off. So he had been wondering about it ever since he woke up. That was when Shizuka, who was part of the cooking society, began explaining.

“Well, first off... because of the commotion with Satomi-kun, the time ran out and Clan-san was disqualified”

“Well that couldn't be avoided. So I carried you back here”

“He says 'I won't say thanks'”

“I know that. You don't need to be mean”

Koutarou having suddenly collapsed was treated as him simply feeling faint. Fortunately, there was no one present that would suspect nanomachines, so the school accepted it right away. However, because of the commotion, the time ran out and with Koutarou out of commission, there weren't enough judges to score and Clan was disqualified. The moment he collapsed, Clan's disqualification was decided.

“Don't worry Glasses. Koutarou isn't really angry. But since you're so cute, he's only pretending to be”

“B-Bertorion!?”

“Oh, I wasn't supposed to say that? Sorry, Koutarou. Ehehehe”

“A-Ahem, w-well, it's true that it was partially my fault, so it would be childish of me to scold you”

Clan blushes slightly and cheered up, as the atmosphere of the room softened up. The truth was that all of the girls were curious about Koutarou's condition and mood. Sensing that change in atmosphere, Shizuka smiled and continued to speak.

“Apart from Clan-san, your paper was filled up with scores, so it was submitted as it was and the cook-off continued”

”'I see'”

“The winner was the current president of the cooking society. The runner up was the person in charge of that restaurant. And Ruth came in third!”

“'It certainly was delicious, that omelette with rice. The flag was nice too. Anyways, congratulations, Ruth-san' he says”

“Thank you very much, Master! I'm so happy right now!”

The order was sort of expected. As Kiriha challenged a special kind of cooking, Ruth ended up with a higher rank.

“That's sort of how it went”

”'Thank you very much, landlord-san'”

“You're welcome”

Koutarou was satisfied, having gotten to hear what he wanted to. He then drank the his tea that had been placed on the tea table in front of him. The tea was already cold, but he didn't make his burned mouth sting.

“Can I have a moment, Koutarou”

The next person to open her mouth was Kiriha. There was something she wanted to ask Koutarou, so she had been waiting for Shizuka to finish.

“'What?'”

“The truth is when you collapsed, I saw your score sheet, and all of our scores were at a standard seven points. I wanted to know the reason for that”

There were basic scores decided for the judging. Delicious food was seven points, normal was five and bad was three. On top of that, the judge could add or subtract three points at their own discretion. This created the possibility of a score between 0 and ten.

On Koutarou's score sheet, all of the girls of room 106 had been given a score of seven, delicious. Though the examination was only half finished, even Clan had been given seven points.

However, that was a weird scoring. Looking at it objectively, Theia, Yurika and Maki all served a dish that would be rated at five points. However, their scores were all seven without exception. Kiriha was curious about that.

“Koutarou is refusing to answer”

Koutarou had a clear answer for Kiriha's question, but he didn't want Sanae to say it. His feelings as a boy of age made him refuse speaking.

“Satomi-kun, I think answering would be better to resolve any misunderstandings”

In contrast to Koutarou who was hesitant to answer, Harumi smiled. She had more or less caught on to Koutarou's intentions. So Koutarou smiled wryly and allowed Sanae to say it.

“'Deliciousness isn't decided by taste alone'”

Having lost his mother at an early age and grown up with just his father, Koutarou would often eat alone. When eating all on his own, nothing he ate felt delicious. Koutarou didn't start feeling a difference in taste until Kenji appeared. That was why everyone had a score of seven. To Koutarou it was an obvious outcome.

“Koutarou...”

Koutarou's true feelings that Sanae had spoken, was actually something that Kiriha had said to Koutarou eleven years ago. That's why she understood the meaning of those words better than anyone. What was important was to be face to face with someone, as that gave the taste a meaning. And that wasn't limited to just taste. It would surely give meaning to living as well.

“Since I got to hear what I wanted to know... I think it's about time for dinner”

In that case, there was something Koutarou and the others should do. In the end, they only faced the judge on their own during the cook-off. So now they needed to be face to face all ten of them together.

“Now that I think about it, we only made food without eating”

“Dinner, huh... Satomi-kun, how is your mouth?”

”'It's okay, landlord-san'”

“Maki-chan, do you think Satomi-san's mouth will heal until dinner time?”

“Stop talking and you help too, Yurika!”

”I will help too”

”Clan-sama, could you prepare some pain relievers, just in case?”

”I think I had some strong ones in my laboratory”

Thus, the cook-off ended and Koutarou and the others returned to their normal life. It was a normal and peaceful everyday life that you could find anywhere.

“By the way, Satomi-san, what are you drinking?”

“He says it's stomach medicine. It looks like Koutarou wasn't trusting our cooking”

“Whaaaaaat!?”

But because of that, they were able to live facing each other. And because they could do that, there was meaning in the natural things such as the food being good, the homework being finished or the manga being interesting.

Afterword

Long time no see everyone, it's the author, Takehaya. This time marks the release of the 20th volume. Strictly speaking, adding in the side chapters and DVD extras, it's the 23rd volume but I am still happy. Thank you very much everyone.

Included in this volume is a series of short stories entitled 'Rokujouma no Shrinyakusha!? Hercules!', and the remaining half will be included in the next volume. Unlike the other work I've done on the series, these are incredibly peaceful.

Truth be told, there is something that is always on my mind when I handle this work. I always worry that the readers might get bored when reading this work, so I gradually change the contents as the volumes progress. For that change, I use Doraemon as a reference. The first stage is the same as usual Doraemon, next, there is sometimes a heartfelt segment with the grandma, and once everyone is used to the characters there's the long dramatic piece. This looks like a proper method, but there is actually a large flaw with this. Depending on the timing of when the reader fell in love with the work, the story might develop in an unwanted fashion.

In particular, when you enter the story summary, there are a lot of serious developments. There are often a lot of fights. There are those that like that kind of story, but it's not necessarily something everyone would want. The readers from the very start I am sure would also like the same as usual Doraemon, and the heartfelt moments that appear from time to time.

So I would sometime like to write volumes like this every now and then, but that creates new problems. That is the problem of keeping the flow intact between the Folsaria arc and the Forthorthe arc. A clear link in the

story was made in the Folsaria arc so I can't imagine being able to squeeze in a period where nothing happens there.

So instead, rather than trying to make a volume out of it, I wanted to squeeze it in between the main volumes. Just then, the 'Read it! HJ Bunko' site for shorter stories was started. That site worked well with what I wanted and the short stories were revealed like this.

From now on, as we advance into the Forthorthe arc, collections of the short stories written on 'Hercules!' will be added in as extras. I will work hard so that everyone can enjoy themselves.

And in the next volume, volume 21, the Forthorthe arc will finally start. I am actually wondering if I should add a subtitle to this or not. If I do, it would be called 'The Golden Princess and the Blue Knight'. The golden princess who had been in a supporting role 2,000 years ago would be taking the lead this part. As the situation develops into something similar to what happened 2,000 years ago, an adventure unfolds. Look forward to it.

That's about it for this time, so I would like to finish with my usual greetings. I would like to give my very grateful thanks to everyone at the editorial department for their hard work publishing 20 volumes, Poco-san who always draws me cute illustrations, and finally to you readers who have supported me for all this time.

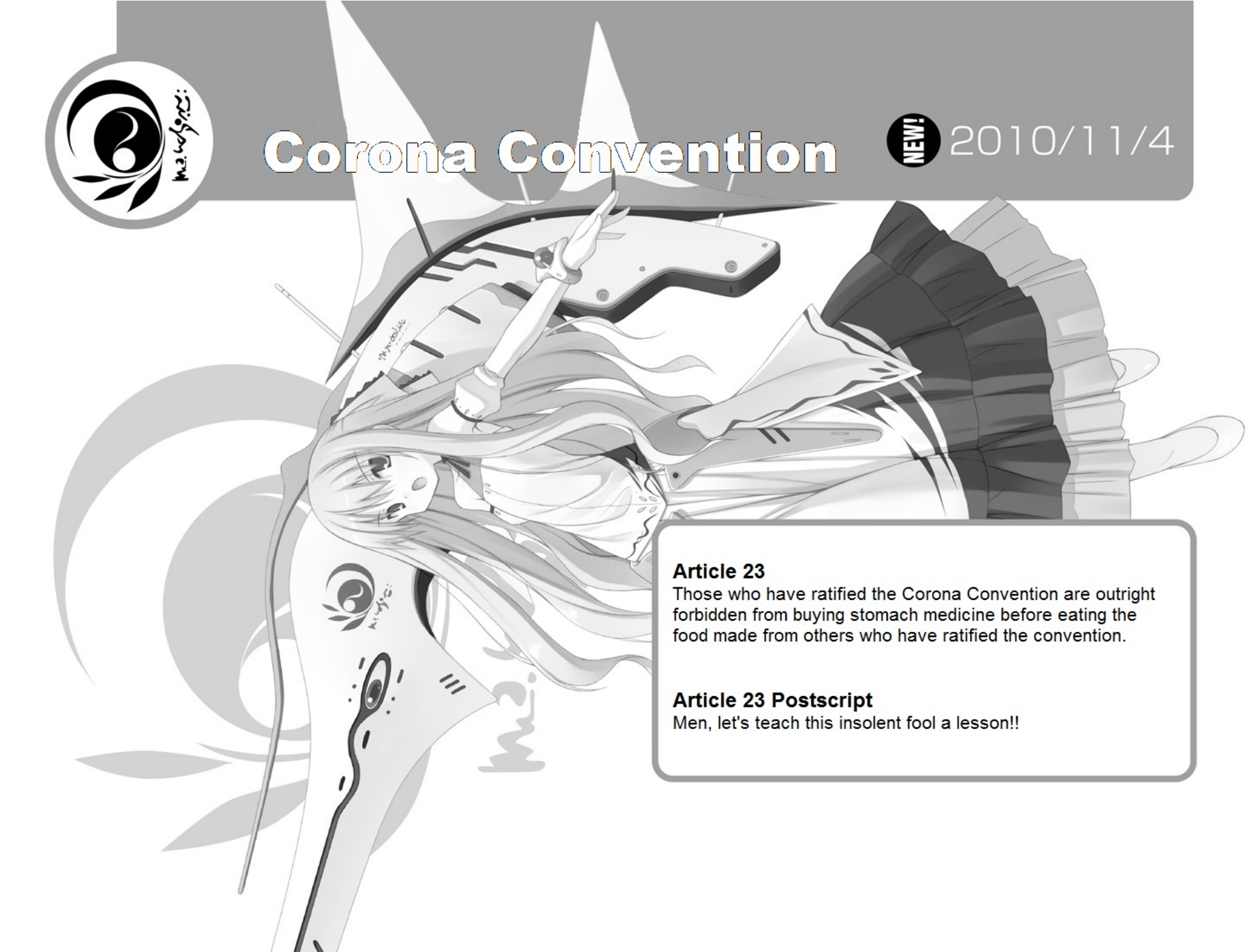
Then let us meet again in the afterword of volume 21.

July, 2015

Takehaya

Corona Convention

NEW! 2010/11/4



Article 23
Those who have ratified the Corona Convention are outright forbidden from buying stomach medicine before eating the food made from others who have ratified the convention.

Article 23 Postscript
Men, let's teach this insolent fool a lesson!!

Translator's Notes and References

1. Jump up↑ A bean jam filling sandwiched between two thin crisp wafers of mochi
2. Jump up↑ A thick jellied snack made from red bean paste
3. Jump up↑ A Japanese recipe for potatoes